

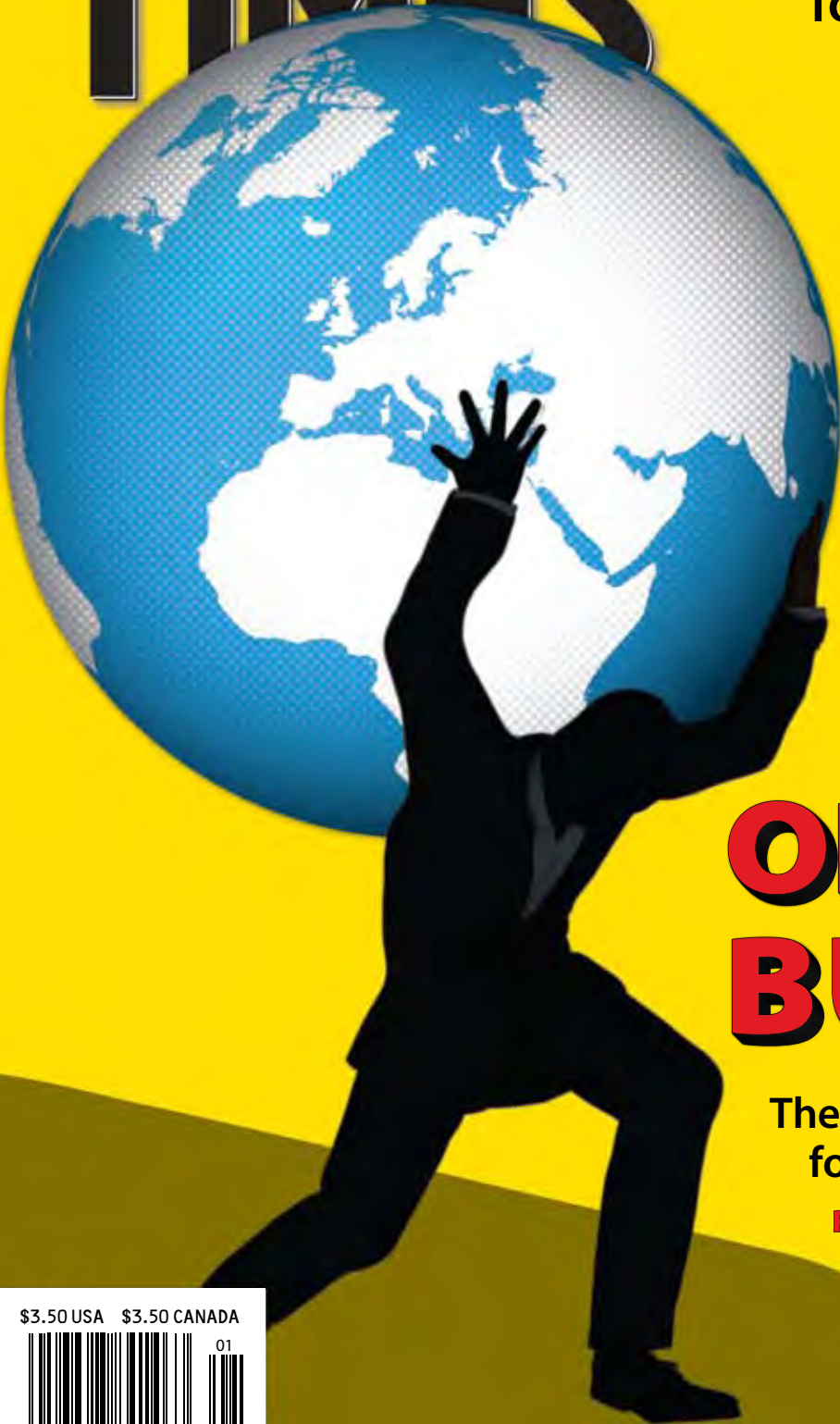
**BUSH'S FINAL PURGE • HAMAS GOES VIRAL**

JANUARY 2009

**IN THESE  
TIMES**

Which **way** to  
**universal** healthcare?

Forced **pregnancies**  
for **teen** immigrants



# **OBAMA'S BURDEN**

The new administration faces  
foreign policy challenges

**ROBERT DREYFUSS REPORTS**

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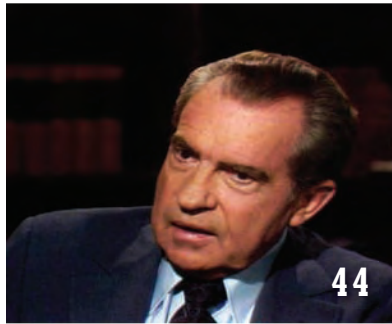


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# editorial

## The Interactive Presidency

**P**RESIDENT-ELECT BARACK OBAMA owns the names, e-mail addresses and gigabytes of other data on 13 million Americans who signed up to receive news from his campaign. Those 13 million—3.1 million of whom contributed a total of \$700 million—account for 19 percent of the 67 million Americans who voted for him.

This corps of supporters could change the American political landscape.

Centrist Democrats may have to learn how to deal with a galvanized electorate. Will the armies of the Internet force members of Congress to retool careers that were built on cultivating politics as usual?

Will pundits find their role as media filter bypassed by Obama's direct outreach to Americans?

Washington lobbyists could have to calculate how much the corporate campaign contributions that they bundle have declined in value. After all, how do they do business in the face of a movement that is not theirs to influence?

Jay Dunn, a flack for the PR firm FD Americas, told Bloomberg news service that in the wake of Obama's election, lobbyists will have "to be part of a larger strategy" that includes "a much more assertive grassroots community outreach." In other words, in order to counter Obama's netroots, K Street will have to manufacture grassroots—what is known in the PR industry as "Astroturf organizing."

The significance of all this is not lost on Richard Viguerie. The direct mail guru of the Republican Right told Bloomberg, "It could be life-changing for American politics. It allows Obama to be independent of everybody."

Everybody in Washington, that is. Obama's 13 million supporters hope their new president will take his cues from them—that their voices be heard

above those of status quo Democrats and corporate flacks, and, perhaps, even sway Obama's centrist inclinations.

On Nov. 18, Obama's campaign manager David Plouffe e-mailed the online legions and asked them to rank the following four "goals for this movement": helping Obama "pass legislation through grassroots efforts"; electing "state and local candidates who share the same vision for our country"; training "volunteers in the organizing techniques we used to elect Barack"; and "working on local issues."

Respondents were then offered a checklist of 26 issues they would be "interested in volunteering or organizing around," such as "LGBT Issues," "War in Iraq," "Environment and Global Warming" and "Healthcare."

Following that, more than 1,500 people signed up to host "Change is Coming" house parties on Dec. 13 and 14 to discuss what they want to do. According to Christopher Hass, the "Obama HQ Blogger," the "input" received from the surveys and house parties "will help guide the future of this grassroots movement."

The incoming administration has also set up Change.gov, a website that allows people to register and discuss policy on its blog. Registered readers can rate the proposals put forth, moving the most popular ideas to the top of the blog.

"Before our eyes, we are witnessing the beginning of a rebooting of the American political system," writes Micah Sifry on the blog of TechPresident.com.

Of course, this "movement" runs the risk of devolving into astroturf. The limitation of Obama's online operation is that, since he owns it, it can't challenge him should he backslide. Yet to the extent that it circumvents the propaganda of the right, Obama's online army could make the difference in realizing a progressive agenda.

—Joel Bleifuss

## IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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# mixed reaction

## JUST THE FACTS



**\$0** Face value of a ticket to President-elect Barack Obama's Jan. 20 inauguration

**\$20,095** Price one broker is asking

**\$1** Price, in millions, of the Pennsylvania Ave. Marriott's "Build Your Own Ball" inauguration package, which includes 300 rooms

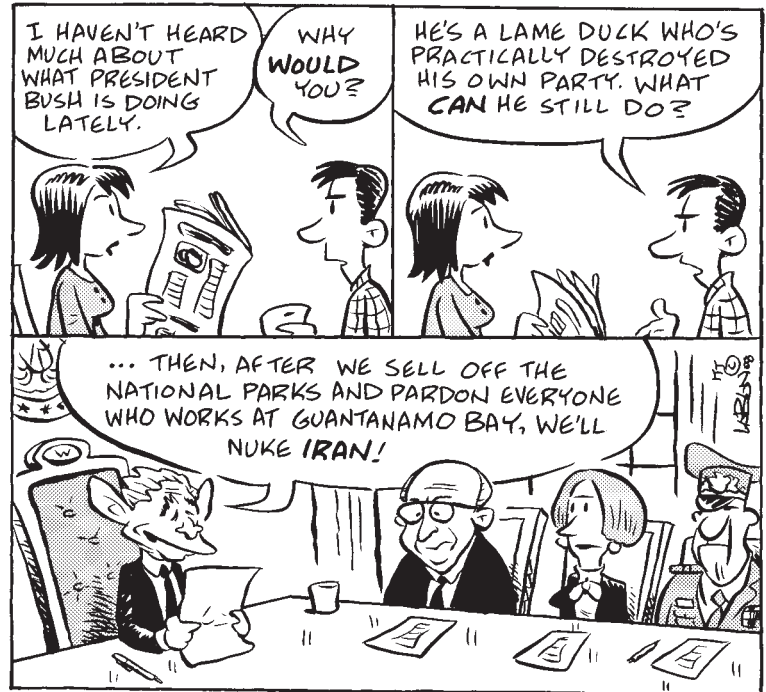
**\$17.3** Amount, in millions, allocated for Bush's second inauguration in 2005, which attracted 300,000 spectators

**\$15** Amount, in millions, of federal funds allocated for Obama's inauguration, which is expected to draw 1.5 million spectators

“ Obviously he will influence the president to be pro-Israel. Why wouldn't he? What is he, an Arab? He's not going to clean the floors of the White House.”

—BENJAMIN EMANUEL, TO ISRAELI MEDIA REGARDING HIS SON'S APPOINTMENT AS OBAMA'S CHIEF OF STAFF

## LABANARAMA BY TERRY LABAN



## QUID PRO QUO

### THE QUID:

Back in 2004, Rep. Charles B. Rangel (D-N.Y.) was upset with Nabors Industries, an oil-drilling company that relocated to the Caribbean in order to reduce its federal tax burden by tens of millions each year. Rangel attempted in vain to pass legislation that would have required the company to pay more in taxes. However, in 2007, when the Senate tried to pass similar legislation, Rangel fought against it through

his position on the House Ways and Means Committee.

### THE QUO:

Why the change of heart? It must not have hurt that Nabors CEO Eugene Isenberg pledged \$1 million to the City College of New York's new Charles B. Rangel School of Public Service, a project that Rangel had previously struggled to raise money for.

Indeed, Isenberg and Rangel met for



breakfast at the Carlyle Hotel in Manhattan on Feb. 12, the day the Ways and Means Committee was marking the bill in question. Eleven days later, the college cashed a check from Isenberg for \$100,000.



# letters



## He regrets nothing

"I feel pride that this nation is making bold steps to atone for its original sin," writes Salim Muwakkil ("Proud of Obama ... For Now," December).

I am white. I voted for President-elect Barack Obama, campaigned for him and contributed more money than I have to any candidate before—and I atoned for nothing. I voted for a fellow American who I believe was by far the most qualified candidate running and who will be the first *thinker* we have had in the White House since JFK.

Muwakkil needs to move beyond the blame game. As our new president has stated, "There is only the United States of America," and we all live in it together.

*Bill Johnston  
Via E-mail*

## Like poetry, God makes nothing happen

I object to Terry Laban's cartoon in your December issue, in which a person seeing Obama has won says, "I think I just stopped being an atheist."

Being happy to see Obama win has nothing to do with religion, and I find it offensive to imply that it does, especially in a liberal magazine such as yours. If you haven't figured it out, I'm an Obama supporter who is still an atheist.

*Vicki Coffman  
Via E-mail*

## Working-class blues

I just finished reading David Sirota's article, "Remembering Those Other Americans," (No-

## Muwakkil needs to move beyond the blame game. As Obama has stated, 'There is only the United States of America,' and we live in it together.

vember) and I am wondering what country Sirota lives in.

At the Democratic National Convention, Vice President-elect Joseph Biden said during his acceptance speech that he represented the middle class. He continued, "I don't call them the working class because they don't like to be called that. They feel it is disrespectful."

Part of what has happened over the last 30-plus years in the United States is a deconstruction of the "working class." Not merely the exportation of jobs and the almost complete obliteration of a manufacturing/farming base, but the complete destruction of any desire to be a member of such a class, not just among the professional elite, but among all Americans—or, at least all white American males.

Having grown up as a poor/working class person, whether middle-class journalists know it or not, a huge part of being "working class" is wanting not to be.

In fact, when Ben Affleck's *Good Will Hunting* character says, "In 20 years ... if you're still working construction, I'm gonna fuckin' kill you. ... It would be an insult to us if you're still here in 20 years," he is expressing a longing that any working person has, and

will have, until we deconstruct the class system entirely.

*Mary Kay Ryan  
Via E-mail*

## In These Pasty Times

As usual, the left is as racist, or more, than the right. Not one of your 22 picks for Obama's cabinet was Latino/Chicano ("22 To Know," October). Not even New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson meets your white, leftist litmus test for presidential counsel. Even Bush picked a lousy (but still Latino) attorney general.

*In These Times* (apparently *In These White Times*) is still stuck in the '60s, when only white and (a few) blacks were considered to have the requisite intelligence, skills and connections to run this country.

What a shame that while Obama counted on Latinos to put him in office, the elitist, white left does not consider Chicanos part of this society.

*Eugene Hernandez  
Via E-mail*

## INTHESETIMES.COM



President-elect Barack Obama's pledge to deploy high-speed Internet access across the country has made media reform advocates optimistic. Megan Tady's December Web-only column looks at what we should expect from Obama on the broadband issue. And *In These Times* Board of Directors member Andrew Lehman explores the political organizing power of the Internet. If the left wants its vision for society to become reality, it must use tech tools and "speak the language of youth," Lehman writes. "In terms of process, the left has become conservative. The Obama Democrats, by using powerful democratizing youth tools, have become the left."



# contributors

## Dear Reader,

With this issue, *In These Times* enters its 33rd year. But the new year is not looking so great for us financially.

Over the decades, *In These Times* has experienced ups and downs, but none like the current economic crisis. Contributions from members of the *In These Times* community make up 70 percent of our revenue. But because of the recession, donations have fallen off dramatically.

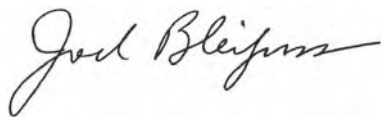
If you have the means to donate above the cost of your subscription—or can give beyond what you normally contribute—we ask that you please do so today. (For your convenience, a postage-paid envelope can be found between pages 26 and 27.)

We've waited a long time for meaningful change. But it won't be handed to us. Change we can believe in is change we must fight for.

To those of you who have been with *In These Times* through the years, we thank you. To our more recent subscribers, we hope you are as pleased with the magazine as we are. But we can't do it without your financial support.

On behalf of the staff, Happy New Year.

In solidarity.



Joel Bleifuss  
Editor & Publisher



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Some undocumented immigrant and refugee youth in U.S. federal custody are being denied abortion rights.

JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES

## No Choice for Immigrants

### Catholic Bishops and HHS trample reproductive rights of teens in federal custody

BY KARI LYDERSEN

**I**N JANUARY 2008, A 16-year-old Guatemalan girl in the care of Commonwealth Catholic Charities of Richmond, Va., told staff members she was pregnant and wanted an abortion.

The girl was one of about 600 youth in the country who are part of the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement's program for unaccompanied, undocumented minors and refugee youth seeking asylum. The U.S. government contracts with private agencies to care for them until they are resettled or deported.

A major contractor for the program is the D.C.-based U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), which contracts with Catholic charities in various states.

On Jan. 17, 2008, Commonwealth

Catholic Charities of Richmond Executive Director Joanne Nattrass learned of the girl's abortion, which was scheduled for the next day. Nattrass told Richmond diocese Bishop Francis DiLorenzo, who told her, "I forbid this to happen," according to Steve Neill, editor of the diocese's official newspaper, the *Catholic Virginian*.

"He found out about it at 11 at night," says Neill. "He was told there was nothing he could do about it. She was determined to have an abortion."

Catholic Charities staff drove the girl to the doctor's office and one staffer signed a consent form. (Virginia law requires parental or guardian consent for minors to get an abortion.) Federal funds were not used to pay for the abortion; it is un-

clear how the abortion was funded.

In March, four Catholic Charities staff members were fired because of the incident. Then, on April 23, the Department of Health and Human Services sent a letter to the USCCB stating that the group had failed to comply with federal regulations by not seeking authorization for an emergency medical procedure.

"Because the information you provided to us indicates a criminal act have been committed [sic], we have referred this matter to the Office of the Inspector General for appropriate action," the letter said.

The ACLU, which is investigating the case for constitutional rights violations, says that after the incident, USCCB leaders began pressuring Catholic Charities to prevent youth in its care from accessing abortion or even contraception.

"The Catholic Church opposes abortion, so I don't think they should have to provide one," says Neill. "A woman who wants to have an abortion by law is allowed to have one, but to have a Catholic agency provide the abortion would be going against their conscience."

The ACLU says the problem lies in the murky definition of what constitutes "support" for an abortion.

"This is a particularly vulnerable population," says Brigitte Amiri, staff attorney with the ACLU's Reproductive Freedom Project. "The healthcare they need is time sensitive, and if they don't speak English ... they can't just walk out the door. There has to be someone helping these kids."

Amiri says it's the responsibility of people contracted under the federal government to care for these minors.

In November, the ACLU filed a lawsuit in federal district court in New York demanding an answer to its Aug. 25 Freedom of Information Act request regarding the government's policies and correspondence with the USCCB on the issue.

Many of the youth have suffered sexual assault or rape in their home country—and/or in transit to the United States, including situations that necessitate immediate reproductive health services, such as



the “morning-after pill” or an abortion.

The ACLU notes that under a 1996 consent decree that resulted from the class-action lawsuit *Flores v. Meese*, the government is obligated to provide medical care and family planning services to undocumented immigrant youth in its care without exception. Interfering with access to contraception or abortion violates the Fifth Amendment constitutional right to privacy, the ACLU complaint states.

The federal government prohibits the use of Office of Refugee Resettlement funds for an abortion, except in cases of rape, incest or physical danger. Amiri of the ACLU says this stipulation is vague enough that it could be interpreted to prevent staff from helping a girl get an abortion.

The ACLU complaint says that state laws requiring consent for minors to have an abortion mean “every teen living in federal custody in a state where parental involvement is mandated must obtain judicial authorization for an abortion.”

Youth can seek a judicial bypass to access an abortion, but most immigrant or refugee youth—who likely don’t speak

English, much less understand the judicial system—are unaware of this option.

Meanwhile, Amiri says the USCCB’s longstanding ban on facilitating access to abortion or even contraception has been reiterated and more strictly enforced nationally since the Richmond case.

In June, a nurse employed by Catholic Charities in Fort Worth, Texas, was allegedly fired for refusing to adhere to a ban against talking about condoms with participants in a program for HIV-positive people. The nurse, Barbara Beaty, is suing Catholic Charities, claiming retaliatory firing. She has said that not discussing condoms as a means of preventing HIV transmission would be medically irresponsible.

“The federal government has allowed the USCCB to prohibit access to contraception and abortion based solely on their religious beliefs,” Amiri says. “If the government has approved that scenario, we have a violation of the separation of church and state.” ■

**KARI LYDERSEN**, a Chicago-based journalist, has written for publications such as the *Chicago Reader*, *The Progressive* and the *Washington Post*.

## Korean Workers Get Sirius

**A**S THEY WAGE a tireless battle against Sirius Satellite Radio, a small band of Korean unionists offers a grim lesson on how corporations have put the screws to workers.

A group of women who assemble radios for Sirius in Seoul, South Korea, organized a union three years ago after the company made the women work 13-hour days, six to seven days a week. Pay was only \$3.62 an hour in the capital city, where the cost of living is similar to that of New York.

Their bosses at the Kiryung Electronics Factory responded by firing the union organizers and threatening to fire anyone who had worked at the factory less than a year. That was most of them. Only 10 of 250 assembly-line workers were permanent. The rest were “dispatch” workers whose jobs are more precarious than those of their U.S. counterparts.

In South Korea, these temps—dispatched to firms by agencies that recruit

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## LGBT IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

Immigration Equality is a national organization that helps advance equal immigration rights for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and HIV-positive community.

Founded in 1994, the nonprofit advocates for LGBT people living in the United States and abroad who have been persecuted based on their sexual orientation, transgender identity or HIV status. Immigration Equality aids those seeking asylum, and provides resources to support advocates, attorneys and those threatened by discriminatory laws.

Immigration Equality works with victims of prejudice from all over the world, but many of its recent clients come from Jamaica and Latin America.

"In the case of Jamaica, some of our clients have had their houses burned down, are lit on fire or are chased by mobs," says Victoria Nielsen, the legal director at Immigration Equality.

The group promotes the Uniting American Families Act (UAF), which would allow committed same-sex partners to sponsor their significant others for the same immigration benefits offered to opposite-sex couples. The bill would affect 36,000 Americans and their partners in long-term relationships, Nielsen says.

The bill will be introduced this year to the new Congress.

To sign the petition in support of the bill, to volunteer to translate, or to learn how to visit a detainee, go to [www.immigrationequality.org](http://www.immigrationequality.org), or call (212) 714-2904.

—Ben Strauss



and place them—can be fired for any reason. What's more, they lack the legal protections guaranteed to other workers and make half as much as permanent workers.

Today, there are about 8.6 million dispatch workers in the country. Close to two-thirds of the work force does not have permanent employment status.

Kiryung hired mostly women. It gave three-month contracts to married women, presumably so they could be fired if they became pregnant. Unmarried women received six-month contracts. Management's policy was to fire one dispatch worker every week, to "keep the waters clean," according to an October report from the National Labor Committee, a New York-based labor research and advocacy group.

"People were fired for the pettiest reasons," says Seok-Soon Oh, a Kiryung worker. "The supervisor would just say he didn't like your face, you were too fat."

Managers sometimes wouldn't even tell them face-to-face that they were going to be fired. Pink slips would arrive via text message, says Hye-Won Chong, international director for the Korean Metal Workers Union, which represents the workers.

The National Labor Committee reported that Kiryung supervisors kept production quotas so high that women couldn't take bathroom breaks. Shifts could stretch to 38 hours, but workers received only two 10-minute breaks, in addition to meals.

"People were terrified. If you were sick, you took some pills and kept working," Oh says. "Once a co-worker collapsed and the boss sent her home, and said, 'Don't bother coming back.'"

Three years ago, when Kiryung tried to break the union by firing almost everyone in the plant, the women occupied the factory for 55 days. As is common in Korea, managers called in riot police and drove them off the premises. The strikers set up camp outside the main gate, where they have remained for three years.

This summer, 35 workers launched a hunger strike, and the union's leader stretched it to 94 days until she was carried to the hospital in late September. She then started her fast anew.

Unable to impress their demands on the factory's management, the strikers looked higher up the corporate food chain.



**South Korean workers protest alleged labor violations by Kiryung Electronics Factory, which builds Sirius Satellite radios.**

Since Kiryung's radios are sold exclusively to Sirius Satellite Radio, a delegation of Kiryung workers and union activists flew to New York in October to ask Sirius to force Kiryung to the bargaining table. Like many corporations, Sirius dictates terms to its suppliers, such as Kiryung. (Korean managers are reportedly now under pressure to shift production to China.)

Although Sirius didn't acknowledge its Korean visitors, no sooner did strikers show up at its Manhattan offices—with traditional drums and banners—that protesters learned company goons were stampeding through the strikers' encampment in Korea. Oh says the thugs stomped on and strangled some of the women strikers.

When Korea suffered its financial meltdown 11 years ago, the country's leaders accepted an International Monetary Fund-led bailout of \$58.4 billion to end the economic freefall. The program forced austerity on the country's workers to shore up "investor confidence."

One of the government's first steps was to dissolve the country's labor laws. Korea's industrial chieftains used the new rules to attack job security and pay. They fired waves of permanent workers and hired cheaper, non-union temporary workers to replace them. With more than 8 million temps in the country, it's no surprise Kiryung is fighting this group so intensely.

"They know millions of Korean workers are in the same situation," Oh says. "If we win, they can, too."

—Mischa Gaus

## Mo' Power for Low Power

**C**HICAGO—THE CHICAGO INDEPENDENT Radio Project (CHIRP), an all-volunteer radio group formed in 2007, will begin webcasting this winter—though millions of city residents who live close to the station won't be able to hear its programming.

That's because urban Low Power FM (LPFM) radio stations remain illegal.

In 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) began accepting LPFM license applications from community groups around the country. But the broadcast lobby, including the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and National Public Radio (NPR) opposed opening up the airwaves. By the end of 2000, Congress—folding under industry pressure—passed the “Radio Broadcasting Preservation Act” to block urban LPFM stations, based on the radio industry's

need,” says Joe Torres, government relations manager for Free Press, a media reform organization. “There is no legitimate basis for NAB and NPR to claim that LPFM will interfere with broadcast stations.”

Since 2000, more than 800 rural LPFM stations have begun broadcasting. In some cases, they provide listeners with local emergency updates and information unavailable on commercial stations.

But urban groups like CHIRP are gearing up for swift passage next year of legislation that could finally bring independent community radio to a city near you.

The legislation, called the Local Community Radio Act, would allow the FCC to license hundreds of LPFM stations to broadcast in urban spectrums currently dominated by high-powered corporate signals, according to Cory Fischer-Hoffman of the Prometheus Radio Project, a grassroots organization that has been advocating for LPFM since 1998. Licenses for these stations—which can have a broadcast radius between three miles and seven miles—would be available to community groups, high schools, labor unions, churches and other nonprofits.

Despite bipartisan sponsorship on Capitol Hill, where it was introduced in both the House and Senate in June 2007, the bill never came up for a vote. That was because the presidential campaign and the financial crisis influenced Congress' priorities, says Fischer-Hoffman.

“We believe that in the next session we're going to be able to push it through in the first 100 days,” she says.

The bill's recent sponsors—Reps. Lee Terry (R-Neb.) and Mike Doyle (D-Pa.), and Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.)—plan to reintroduce it this year, spokespeople in their offices say. But none could say exactly when. Lisa Ellis, Terry's communications director, says the ongoing economic crisis will affect how quickly legislation can pass.

The NAB will likely continue to oppose bills that alter existing interference protections, says Kristopher Jones, an NAB spokesman. NPR did not respond to calls for comment, but in an April 2008 filing with the FCC, the nonprofit broadcaster opposed loosening technical restrictions on LPFM stations.

While stations await Congress to allow the FCC to hand out Low Power FM licenses, CHIRP is moving forward with its plans online. The group will focus on Chicago music and culture.

“We want it to be a conversation with the city,” CHIRP President Shawn Campbell says. “A Chicago-based station that welcomes listeners from everywhere.”

By February, CHIRP Radio will be webcasting at ChirpRadio.org, although the online station will limit its listenership because of expensive Internet royalty rates.

“There's no reason for us to wait around and see what may happen with federal legislation,” Campbell says. “Ultimately, at the end of the day, that's out of our hands.”

—Jeremy Gantz

## Bush's Final Purge

**T**HE BUSH ADMINISTRATION is reportedly using its final months in office to exact retribution on federal employees who have spoken out against agency policies during the past eight years.

Since April, the administration has dismissed—or notified of pending dismissal—more than a dozen federal whistleblowers, according to Marsha Coleman-Adebayo, founder of the civil rights group No Fear Coalition and director of the National Whistleblowers Center. Some have come as recently as November. They include staffers at the Departments of Commerce, Labor, Education and Transportation. And, Coleman-Adebayo says, those are only the employees who are willing to go on record.

“We have a much longer list,” she says. “A number of people have asked us not to share their names publicly as they are hoping to keep their government jobs.”

For Coleman-Adebayo, the firings are a “final act of retaliation” against employees—many of them longtime staffers—who have expressed dissent within President Bush's highly politicized federal agencies.

So far, the dismissals have flown largely under the radar. Representatives of the Government Accountability Project (GAP) and the Project on Government Oversight—prominent whistleblower advocacy groups—say they were unaware of the recent firings but were not surprised.

Jesselyn Radack, a former Justice De-



CHIRP President Shawn Campbell meets with volunteers on Nov. 20.

claim that adding 100-watt, low-power stations into the FM spectrum would endanger full-power broadcasters' signals.

However, in 2003 the Mitre Corporation, funded by a \$2 million grant from the government, found that LPFM stations do not interfere with the signals of existing full-power stations. In late 2007, the FCC recommended that Congress eliminate the interference regulation that blocked LPFM stations from entering urban airwaves.

“I don't know what more evidence they



partment whistleblower who serves as homeland security director at GAP, says such purges have been a Bush administration policy since the beginning.

"It's hard to imagine that they're doing it at a faster rate than the meteoric pace they already have been," Radack wrote in an e-mail. "I would view such a phenomenon as just a continuation of [the administration's] notorious eight-year long, brutal campaign of retaliation against anyone who dissents, disagrees or exercises independent judgment."

Coleman-Adebayo, herself a policy analyst and whistleblower at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), received notice of her own dismissal on Oct. 30. She had 15 days to respond to the roughly 200-page document, which cited "medical inability to perform the duties of her position" as the reason for her termination. Coleman-Adebayo suffers from hypertension and had been working from home. She is currently on unpaid medical leave from the EPA.

Coleman-Adebayo's troubles with the

EPA began under the Clinton administration. On assignment in Africa, she raised a red flag over a U.S. corporation that was poisoning its workers with toxic waste in South Africa. When the EPA failed to act, she went public—a move her superiors did not appreciate.

In the months following her whistleblowing, Coleman-Adebayo, who is African American, was subjected to racial and sexual harassment, according to details released in the ensuing court battle. In 2000, a jury awarded her \$600,000—the largest award ever levied against the EPA.

"Essentially, the EPA was reduced to finding something that is pretty farfetched and actually illegal to fire me," Coleman-Adebayo says. "So this is clearly a last-minute 'Hail Mary' in terms of getting rid of me—they simply didn't have any other basis."

EPA spokesman Jonathan Schrader declined to discuss the Coleman-Adebayo case in depth, saying it is against agency policy to comment on personnel matters.

"All I can say at this point is that she remains an EPA employee," he said, add-

ing, "If you call back in about a week, that could change." Schrader stressed that his decision not to elaborate on the case "is certainly not an admission that any of her accusations are truthful."

Coleman-Adebayo has worked closely with lawmakers to pass the Notification of Federal Employees Anti-discrimination and Retaliation Act. Known as the No FEAR Act, it created guidelines that federal agencies must follow in dealing with whistleblower complaints and notifying employees of their rights. In 2002, Bush signed the act into law.

Coleman-Adebayo says she plans to challenge her dismissal—a fight she expects to win. But she says the real test will come Jan. 20.

"I'm hoping the new president will send a clear message that he will not tolerate this kind of illegal retaliation and harassment, and one way that he can do that is to reinstate whistleblowers who were terminated at the end of the Bush administration," she says. "It would be a very powerful gesture."

—Christopher Moraff

## appall-o-meter

### 2.3 Vive La Difference

America has its jocks vs. nerds, Britain its mods vs. rockers, and Mexico its emo kids vs. *cholos*. But it took La Belle France to produce a subculture rivalry to end them all. According to the *Sunday Times*, a battle rages in the Mediterranean resort community of Cap d'Agde between nudists and wife-swappers.

Hostilities came out in the open in April, the *Times* reports, when Glamour, a *boîte échangiste* (or swingers' club), was burnt to the ground. The next day another such establishment went down in flames, and in September arsonists destroyed the orgy club Tantra and a neighboring bar, Zen.

So far, no arrests have been made, but suspicion falls heavily on the "mullahs of chaste nudity," as a French magazine dubbed the long-established local nudist community. The nudists bridle at being associated with the licentiousness of the wife-swappers. "What goes on in certain places is not naturism," Guy Delfour, former head of a French naturism federation, sniffed to the *Times*. "Nudity is just one element of naturism. There are other values to recognize, such as the protection

of nature."

Local police have generally assumed a laissez-faire attitude, only clamping down on things when they become a public spectacle (as they did recently, the *Times* reports, when a man was whipping his wife on a balcony for an audience of horny onlookers).

### 3.2 Because He Cares

To understand the economic troubles we're in, forget all that complicated mumbo-jumbo about collateralized debt obligations. It's all a cut-and-dry morality tale to Ayman al-Zawahiri, the No. 2 man in al Qaeda. "The modern economy has been destroyed by the strikes of the mujahedeen and usury," Zawahiri said in a video statement, according to the AP. And there's a simple way out: "[E]mbrace Islam to live a life free of greed, exploitation and forbidden wealth."

Thanks, Ayman, but we're good with the forbidden wealth.



### 3.9 This Soccer Mom Packs Heat

Never let it be said that wingerdom has no love for the frivolous lawsuit. The Harrisburg, Pa., *Patriot-News* reports that one Meleanie Hain of Lebanon, Pa., has sued her county sheriff over the revocation of her permit to carry a concealed handgun. The sheriff yanked the permit on the grounds that Hain

had exercised poor judgment with her firearm—to wit, conspicuous display of her rod at her daughter's soccer games. A judge reinstated Hain's permit but cautioned her to conceal the gun at the soccer games. (Ah, the wisdom of judges!)

Hain, who insists she is going to keep right on displaying the gun at the soccer games, is hoping to recover damages of more than \$1 million for the usual litany of bullshit lawsuit claims, including harm to her business ... as a babysitter.

—Dave Mulcahey

# We Arm the World

**A** \$7 BILLION MISSILE-DEFENSE system for the United Arab Emirates. An estimated \$15 billion potential sale of Lockheed Martin's brand-new fighter plane to Israel. Billions of dollars in weaponry for Taiwan and Turkey. These and other recent deals helped make the United States the world's leading arms-exporting nation.

In 2007, U.S. foreign military sales agreements totaled more than \$32 billion—nearly triple the amount during President Bush's first full year in office.

The Pentagon routinely justifies weapons sales as “promoting regional stability,” but many of these arms end up in the world's war zones. In 2006 and 2007, the five biggest recipients of U.S. weapons were Pakistan (\$3.5 billion), Iraq (\$2.2 billion), Israel (\$2.2 billion), Afghanistan (\$1.9 billion) and Colombia (\$580 million)—all countries where conflict rages.

In Pakistan, the fighting ranges from communal violence and state repression, to attacks against India, to deadly battles between Pakistani military and al Qaeda forces in the northwest provinces. Israel has used U.S.-supplied weapons in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as in the 2006 invasion of Lebanon. Colombia uses U.S. weaponry to fight the drug war. Of the 27 major conflicts during 2006 and 2007, 19 of them involved U.S.-supplied weapons.

While full data is not yet available for 2008, the United States continues to flood warzones with more destabilizing weapons. In 2008, the Pentagon brokered more than \$12.5 billion in possible foreign military sales to Iraq, including guns, ammunition, tanks and attack helicopters.

Raed Jarrar, an Iraqi analyst with American Friends Service Committee, notes the chance that this weaponry will promote peace and democracy in Iraq is slim.

“The current Iraqi armed forces are the same forces and militias that have been committing ethnic and sectarian cleansing during the last years and they have a violent record full of human rights violations, torture and assassinations,” says Jarrar.

What's more, the United States cannot successfully track its weapons. Hundreds of thousands of U.S.-supplied pistols and

## snapshot



**An Afghan boy stands alongside U.S. soldiers from the Army's 1-506 Infantry Division on Nov. 29, following a major clash in Paktika province, situated along the Afghan-Pakistan border. Troops killed 44 Taliban fighters, and around a dozen police and soldiers are missing and believed to be in Taliban hands. (Photo by David Furst/AFP/Getty Images)**

automatic weapons destined for Iraqi security forces between 2004 and 2005 remain lost, according to the Government Accountability Office.

The Pentagon has “no idea where they are,” Rachel Stohl, a senior analyst at the Center for Defense Information, a national-security think tank, told the *Washington Post* in 2007. “It likely means that the United States is unintentionally providing weapons to bad actors.”

U.S. law curbs weapons sales to countries engaged in a “gross and consistent” pattern of human rights abuses or to countries using U.S. weapons for aggressive purposes. But these requirements are often set aside in favor of short-term objectives.

Michael Klare, director of the Amherst, Mass.-based Five College Program in Peace and World Security Studies, has followed the arms trade for decades. He discounts official claims that the delivery of arms can help promote stability.

“The more we help one side, the more that regime's opponents are driven to

seek arms from another supplier, leading to an inevitable spiral of arms buying, provocation and conflict,” Klare says.

According to Stohl, “The Bush administration has demonstrated a willingness to provide weapons and military training to weak and failing states and countries that have been repeatedly criticized by the U.S. State Department for human rights violations, lack of democracy and even support of terrorism.”

The Obama administration could mark a new era in arms trade. On the campaign trail, Obama expressed openness to signing the global cluster munitions ban, but he has yet to speak about a global Arms Trade Treaty—which would establish more rigorous conditions for weapons exports—or about curbing weapons sales, in general.

“The arms trade is never a panacea for instability,” Klare says. “It can only enflame regional tensions and heighten the risk of war.”

— Frida Berrigan

# BACK TALK

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

## Invisible Women



**S**O HERE'S THE great contradiction of the 2008 presidential campaign: It was all about women, and not about women at all.

With Hillary Clinton's historic run for the presidency, and Sarah Palin's high profile run for veep—which maybe set women back 50 years—the spotlight remained on individual women and, inevitably, on their pantsuits, cleavage and peep toe shoes.

But women's issues? Invisible, barely uttered. Indeed, the person making the most sustained case for a focus on female-centered issues was Michelle Obama.

The high visibility of all of these women (each different, of course, but nonetheless successful and financially comfortable) makes it seem as if gender equality has been achieved and that sexism—except that coming from white male pundits on cable—is a thing of the past.

The word “sexism” got bandied about (laughably, by Republican operatives), but almost exclusively to characterize what you could or couldn't say about Clinton and Palin.

That actual sexism and genuine economic discrimination might continue to keep millions of women (and their children) in their place? Preposterous. Isn't that so 1970s?

If a woman can run for president and vice president, aren't we done here? Isn't feminism unnecessary, even irrelevant?

Television reinforces this notion, as well. Watch various successful, primetime shows—“Grey's Anatomy,” “Boston Legal,” “The Closer,” “House,” the various iterations of “CSI” and “Law & Order”—and women are surgeons, top partners in law firms, judges, DAs, forensic scientists (although with cleavage usually reserved for “gentlemen's clubs”).

On the news, in addition to Katie Couric now anchoring “CBS Nightly News” (and, by the way, doing a much better job than she's given credit for), the cable channels are filled with female reporters, anchors and pundits.

Women like me celebrate these accomplished women who handle, quite well, jobs previously reserved for men. But ironically, women are now overrepresented as having achieved “it all,” so that the notion that there might be the need for ongoing feminist struggle seems, well, quaint.

Women who earn the median income—\$35K for females in 2007—working-class women and poor women have

been erased from the national, public imagination.

In the real world, most women are not doctors, lawyers or TV reporters. What were, in 2007, the top jobs for women? Secretaries, nurses, elementary and middle school teachers, cashiers, retail salespersons, nursing and home health aids, waitresses, maids and housekeeping cleaners and hairdressers.

While some of these jobs provide a decent living, others pay minimum wage—or less. According to Sara Gould, president of the Ms. Foundation, two-thirds of the minimum wage and below-minimum wage work force in the United States is female. Of the 37 million Americans living in poverty, 27 million are women. The National Council for Research on Women reports that the subprime disaster disproportionately affects African-American and Latina women.

**I'm hoping that, as secretary of state, we get a Hillary 'It Takes A Village' Clinton who will see the welfare of women as central to her statecraft.**

White women still make 77 cents to a man's dollar (it's 62 cents for African-American women and only 53 cents for Latina women), and a 2007 American Association of University Women study showed

that after one year of employment, female college graduates earn 20 percent less than their male colleagues. After 10 years in the work force, they earn 30 percent less.

Many mothers face discrimination at work, some of it subtle yet costly. We have the flimsiest support network for mothers and children of any industrialized country, with, still, no paid maternity leave and no nationally funded and regulated day care system. African-American and Latina women, still vastly underrepresented or stereotyped in the media, endure more poverty, brutality, crappy healthcare and disease than their white counterparts.

The foundational role that female poverty plays in the health of a nation's economy is a fact not only for the United States but for developing countries around the world.

So, I'm hoping that, as secretary of state, we might get Hillary “It Takes A Village” Clinton who—in addition to all the post-Bush disasters she'll have to confront—will see the welfare of women and children as central to her statecraft.

And I'm cheering Michelle Obama on in her efforts to advance a variety of policies that support women and families.

The legions of invisible women, struggling without any acknowledgement and erased by a media that makes them seem the minority when they are the majority, need to be made visible right now. Maybe we can make the 2008 campaign about women after all. ■



BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

## Al Qaeda Plays the Malcolm Card



**W**HEN MEDIA REPORTS emerged that al Qaeda's second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, disparaged President-elect Barack Hussein Obama as a "house negro," it angered many in the black community. However, it also struck a chord.

The Egyptian physician—who is reportedly Osama bin Laden's confidant—actual-

ly used the phrase "house slave," but it was later translated as "house negro."

Al-Zawahiri said, "You [Obama] represent the direct opposite of honorable black Americans like Malik al-Shabazz or Malcolm X," who "condemned the crimes of the Crusader West against the weak and oppressed, and he declared his support for peoples resisting American occupation."

The al Qaeda leader said Obama, Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice "confirmed" Malcolm X's definition of a "house slave." He was referring to Malcolm X's distinction between slave-era "house Negroes," who lived comfortably in the big house abetting white supremacy, and "field negroes," who toiled in the fields under the whip, plotting resistance.

But his metaphor was wrong about Obama: If anything, he would now be the housemaster, not the slave.

What's more, Al Qaeda is deploying this particular metaphor to offset Obama's global popularity, particularly in East Africa. Many of these Islamist groups fear the election of a black American president with explicit African roots and symbolic Islamic connections will lessen the anti-American fervor among their recruitment targets.

Although al-Zawahiri overplayed his hand with such a transparent racial ploy, he did manage to draw attention to what could be a troublesome issue for many progressive activists, particular for those who are African-American.

Many advocates of progressive international policies see the United States as "imperialism central." And for good reason. Stephen Kinzer's 2006 book, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*, makes clear this nation's ignoble history in subverting and deposing foreign governments. Kinzer concludes, "No nation in modern history has done this so often, in so many places

so far from its own shores."

The response to al-Zawahiri's comments also revealed African-American Muslims have little love for radicalized Islamists. At a news conference in New York City at the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial, Educational and Cultural Center, a gathering of African-American Muslim leaders denounced al-Zawahiri's remarks as "insulting." The group added, "As Muslims and as Americans, we will never let terrorist groups or terror leaders falsely claim to represent us or our faith."

The statement also noted that radicalized Islamists have, "historically been disconnected from the African-American community generally, and Muslim African-Americans in particular."

**Many Islamist groups fear the election of a black American president with explicit African roots will lessen anti-American fervor among their recruits.**

This was a veiled shot at Arabs' historic role in the slave trade and the racism still blemishing some Arab nations, such as in Sudan.

Minister Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of

Islam—which is generally separate from other African-American Islamic groups—has been effusive in his praise for Obama. And Farrakhan has made clear his disdain for groups that employ terrorism.

Despite Farrakhan's aversion to al Qaeda's tactics, his foreign policy prescriptions probably would please al-Zawahiri and "condemn the crimes of the Crusader West against the weak and oppressed." With their man Obama now leading the "Crusader West," where will the Nation of Islam stand when the crusade inevitably continues?

More generally, where will black progressives stand?

No doubt, there will be strong black critics of the Obama administration who will keep the first black president's feet to the fire.

Others may find more to love about America. If the Obama administration decides to bomb Pakistan's tribal territories, for example, these supporters, who once may have questioned the wisdom of unilateral bombing, now will urge critics to "understand the bigger picture."

In October 2002, actor and activist Harry Belafonte called Powell and Rice "house negroes" for their subservience to the Bush administration. He was condemned in the media, but the black community had his back. If Belafonte said the same about Obama today, he would have to take a banana boat back to Jamaica. ■

BY JOHN IRELAND

## Prop Hate and My Family



**L**AST LABOR DAY, my partner and I were legally married in California. Two months later, 52 percent of Californians voted to take our marriage rights away.

Between June and November, more than 18,000 same-sex couples were married in the state. The legal validity of those unions is now in question.

The majority of voters in Arizona and Florida also chose to deny marriage equality to same-sex couples, but one of the most egregious decisions came in Arkansas, where voters banned unmarried couples from fostering or adopting children.

My partner of 15 years and I adopted our son in 2005. More than 500,000 American children languish in our foster system, and gay and lesbian people are increasingly playing a crucial role as caregivers and as parents.

Laws that seek to prevent gays and lesbians from parenting are cruel. First, they harm children who are growing up in foster homes or orphanages, many with little hope for a stable home life. Second, such legislation disenfranchises families that are already being led by gay and lesbian parents. By making it hard for us to legally protect our families, these laws stigmatize our children.

Children who come into “the system” need consistency and love. Skilled and dedicated foster parents are the child’s best bet for stability, but a shortage of qualified foster parents imperils this reality. By excluding gays and lesbians, our most vulnerable children suffer.

Opponents of marriage equality do not want gays and lesbians to become parents, but they are too late. According to the National Adoption Clearinghouse, gay and lesbian parents in America are raising an estimated 8 million to 10 million children.

Raising kids is difficult. All parents want to explain the world to their children and teach them how to contribute as productive citizens.

Many parents tell their children they can grow up to be president some day. We are thrilled that our son will grow up with President-elect Obama as a positive black role model.

But this recent election has also left us with mixed mes-

sages for our son. Through the statewide referendums, society is telling him that we are not a family.

Obama has pledged to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act and enact legislation that would, “ensure that the 1,100-plus federal legal rights and benefits currently provided on the basis of marital status are extended to same-sex couples in civil unions and other legally recognized unions.”

Most of the rights, benefits and responsibilities that come from marriage include family and medical leave, Social Security and tax benefits, and equal access to a spouse’s health insurance coverage. With marriage, gay and lesbian partners are guaranteed hospital visitation and next-of-kin status for emergency medical decisions or wrongful death suits. These rights also allow for joint parenting rights, including access

to school records and, in the case of separation, custody and visitation.

No matter what individual states offer, these rights and responsibilities are conveyed on a national level only by the

federal recognition of same-sex marriages.

Massachusetts has offered same-sex couples the right to marry since 2004, and Connecticut began doing so in November. Nine states and the District of Columbia offer civil unions or domestic partnerships. And the sky hasn’t fallen.

Two days after California’s Proposition 8 passed, I marched with a few thousand other Californians to protest the decision. I hadn’t planned on marching, but I needed an outlet for my frustration. We marched through the streets, carrying signs, chanting, smiling and waving. Some commuters honked their horns in support. Others, not so much.

It was heartening to see our many allies, and almost as gratifying to see eye to eye—for a change—those who oppose our equal rights.

The next morning at work, a colleague said to me, “I support your rights, but my husband was caught in traffic for an hour. We didn’t even have dinner as a family until 8:30 p.m.!”

The phrase “as a family” stuck with me. This is a reasonable person, a friend, who does not see my life—the fight for my family—the same as I do.

Absent federal action, we cannot win equal protection for our families. Like with so many crises in our nation’s history, I have faith that there is a uniquely American solution. I have to believe that, with our new leadership, we will find it together. ■

**Laws that prevent gays and lesbians from parenting harm children who are growing up in foster homes or orphanages with little hope.**



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# Mind the Gap

## What the narrowing divide between a center-left nation and a center-right establishment portends

BY DAVID SIROTA

**I**N THE LAST TWO decades, three early November days have witnessed the collapse of movements that shaped the 20th century:

First, Communism fell with the Berlin Wall on Nov. 9, 1989. Second, New Deal liberalism—weakened by Ronald Reagan’s 1980 election—was crushed as Republicans took Congress on Nov. 8, 1994. And third, free-market conservatism dropped dead with President-elect Barack Obama’s decisive victory on Nov. 4, 2008.

This most recent implosion was both shocking and predictable. Shocking because only a few years ago, Republicans were predicting a permanent conservative majority. And predictable because the attempts to cement such permanence—whether through the war on terrorism, the Iraq invasion, tax cuts, structural deficits or financial deregulation—seeded a foreseeable backlash.

Indeed, the conservative Hoover Institute admits “the country’s political center of gravity is shifting from center-right to center-left.”

Of course, you don’t hear that truism much in the media—even after 67 million Americans voted for a Democratic candidate who was repeatedly billed as a “socialist,” a “Marxist” and/or “the most liberal senator” in American history. Instead, what you hear—from NBC’s Tom Brokaw on down—is that America remains a “center-right nation.” A glance at the empirical data shows nothing could be further from the truth.

Pre-election polls showed most voters believed Obama is a progressive, and the election witnessed most Americans casting their vote for that progressive. While some of that vote was a protest against George W. Bush, its ideological thrust is undeniable.

According to a post-election November



survey by the Campaign for America’s Future (CAF), 70 percent of Americans say they want conservatives to help Obama enact his decidedly progressive agenda. The poll followed CAF’s 2007 study showing that on almost every major economic issue, the “center” of public opinion is far to the left of Establishment opinion. But that gap may be narrowing.

### A new Summers

In 1989, economist John Williamson coined the term “Washington Consensus” as shorthand for the package of privatization, deregulation and free-trade schemes that has come to define Democratic and Republican neoliberalism. During the now-concluding era of market fundamentalism, no publication has been a bigger booster of that consensus than the *Financial Times*. And yet nothing personifies the change in that consensus than a recent series of Lawrence Summers op-eds in that

same newspaper.

Summers got his start in politics as a member of President Reagan’s Council of Economic Advisers, and ultimately ascended to Treasury Secretary under President Clinton. His term was an extension of predecessor Robert Rubin’s dogged devotion to free trade and deficit reduction, though Summers managed two crowning achievements even Rubin couldn’t muster. In 1999, he endorsed an infamous government report that “recommended legislation exempting many kinds of derivatives from federal oversight,” according to the *New York Times*. He also backed congressional Republicans’ successful initiatives to gut Depression-era safeguards against unbridled financial speculation. Less than 10 years later, experts agree those decisions exacerbated—if not created—the recent Wall Street meltdown.

The same goes for Summers’ lockstep advocacy for free trade—pacts like the

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its bilateral derivatives, which have exerted downward pressure on domestic wages by forcing Americans into salary-cutting competitions with low-paid foreign labor. That Lawrence Summers, however, is hard to find today.

The new Summers spent 2008 authoring a series of *Financial Times* articles that suggested a new Washington Consensus. Summers, once the deficit reducer, recently advocated for fiscal stimulus and, in another piece, derided those who argue the recent Wall Street bailout means new social programs are unaffordable.

Summers—once the free-trade booster—sounded downright Ross Perot-like in an article noting that “growth in the global economy encourages the development of stateless elites whose allegiance is to global economic success and their own prosperity rather than the interests of the nation where they are headquartered.”

Even on the topic of financial regulation, Summers now insists that America must “regulate leverage and prevent government policies that give rise to a toxic combination of privatised gains and socialised losses.”

### **‘A Copernican shift’**

Skeptics might look at Summers’ about-face and see a former titan angling for a role in the Obama administration. (And indeed, he was named director of the National Economic Council.)

That’s surely part of it—but the posturing confirms a deeper ideological shift.

For example, Rubin—the godfather of the Wall Street Democrats—co-wrote a *New York Times* op-ed with progressive economist Jared Bernstein. The piece was as stunning for the cooperation of the two unlikely collaborators as it was for Rubin’s deficit admission (“our economy needs a large fiscal stimulus”) and trade reversal (“we must recognize that protecting workers is not protectionism”).

Likewise, writing in the *New Republic*, Christopher Hayes noted that two icons, Nobel laureate Paul Samuelson and former Federal Reserve Governor Alan Blinder, recently published papers raising red flags about continuing our current laissez-faire globalization policies.

“Nearly all of the dozen or so economists I’ve spoken to have said that the academic conversation about trade *has* moved significantly,” Hayes reported, adding that this change represents “nothing less than a Copernican shift” in Establishment discourse.

### **The times are a changin’**

With news coverage focusing on White House staffing, there has been endless

## **The hiring of Clintonites has many concerned the President-elect will evade his far-reaching promises and replicate the incrementalism of the ‘90s. But times have changed.**

speculation about the policy implications of different appointees. The parlor game is made all the easier because Obama has hired many Clintonites with well-known records, prompting concerns from progressive quarters that the President-elect will evade his far-reaching promises and replicate the incrementalism of the ‘90s.

Times have changed, though.

Obama ascends to the White House with 52 percent of the popular vote—and thus a far bigger progressive mandate than Clinton, who entered office with just 43 percent of the vote. Furthermore, Obama assumes the presidency during a much deeper economic crisis than the 1992 recession. While conservative strategist Grover Norquist is right that “personnel is policy,” an appointee’s record under Clinton may be a poor predictor of behavior in an Obama future.

Consider Rahm Emanuel, Obama’s new chief of staff. Previously, this quintessential Washington insider spearheaded the Clinton administration’s efforts to squelch Democratic congressional objections and pass NAFTA. Fifteen years later, Emanuel said the incoming administration would oppose Republican plans to lash economic recovery legislation to a trade pact expanding NAFTA into Colombia.

Likewise, political tectonics may force Obama himself to go farther than his own progressive promises.

“Remember, Franklin Roosevelt gave no evidence in his prior career that he was going to lead the dramatic sea change

in American politics that he led,” says University of California historian Eric Rauchway. “And yet, his time in office became a major shift in a liberal direction.”

For Roosevelt, a growing labor movement, a radicalized public and the threat of a significant electoral challenge—from left-wing populists like Louisiana Gov. Huey Long—pushed him to embrace far-reaching New Deal programs that he might never have supported.

Today, a skeptic might say the labor movement is not nearly as powerful as it once was, and the groups that are radicalized often put most of their energy into electoral work supporting parties and individual candidates—not social movements.

In fact, with Obama considering converting his campaign e-mail list into something of a state-directed advocacy apparatus, he may have a grassroots machine specifically designed to thwart independent progressive pressure against his government. That’s not as far-fetched a possibility as it sounds, considering congressional Democrats’ explicit declaration of war against “The Left.”

In late November, *The Hill* newspaper ran a story headlined “Democratic leader says party won’t turn left,” about a speech by House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.). And when Senate Democrats voted to ignore Sen. Joe Lieberman’s (I-Conn.) vicious attacks on Obama and reappoint him to his committee chairmanship, a Senate spokesman sneered: “The left has been foiled again.”

But if 2008 convinced America to do anything, it is to (guardedly) hope.

If the Washington Consensus can change; if the gulf between public and elite opinion can narrow; and if an African American can mobilize millions to feel even momentary ownership over the nation’s political process, then maybe Obama is right: Maybe we are the ones we’ve been waiting for. ■

# OBAMA'S BURDEN

**From Israel to Afghanistan, foreign policy challenges will test the new administration**

**BY ROBERT DREYFUSS**

For those appalled by the arrogant unilateralism of the Bush era, the Obama administration will be a relief. But for those who believe that American policy in South and Southwest Asia was misguided in the decades before President Bush, they shouldn't expect anything too different from Obama and what the *Wall Street Journal* calls "Obama's War Cabinet." President-





elect Barack Obama will have to deal with a misshapen global war on terrorism and two failed wars: In Iraq, Bush's adventures in empire-building have left an uneasy ceasefire and a seething mess of well-armed enemy militias that could explode into renewed violent civil war at any moment. In Afghanistan, the U.S.-NATO occupation, besieged by a powerful Islamist insurgency, is losing the war.

In Pakistan, a shaky ci-

gers, but most governments—and most citizens—in the Middle East seem willing to give Obama the benefit of the doubt.

He has made a commitment to withdraw U.S. combat forces from Iraq on a 16-month timetable, and he has promised to open a high-level dialogue with Iran. He has also pledged to end torture and close the prison at Guantánamo Bay. To signal that he plans to abandon the Crusade-like rhetoric of Bush's war on terror, Obama has stated plans to deliver a major speech on the future of U.S.-Muslim relations in an Islamic country early in

into Afghanistan, and he refused to criticize the Bush administration's policy of launching Predator drone missile strikes at sanctuaries in Pakistan's tribal areas.

"If we have Osama bin Laden in our sights and the Pakistani government is unable or unwilling to take them out, then I think that we have to act and we will take them out," Obama said in the second of his three presidential debates with Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.). "We will kill bin Laden. We will crush al Qaeda."

But that hard line could drag him deeper into the Afghan morass. Over the past

## **Distinguishing Obama's campaign rhetoric—calculated to protect his right flank—from what he might do in office is like trying to discern patterns in shifting sands.**

vilian government is facing an Islamist-inspired insurgency of its own, one that may or may not be allied to Pakistan's own intelligence service.

A resurgent Iran has built a network of allies—overt and covert in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine—and is pushing ahead with its nuclear enrichment program.

In Lebanon, new elections could catapult the Iranian-allied Hezbollah party into power. The Israel-Palestine deadlock has calcified, made worse by the possibility that February elections in Israel could bring Bibi Netanyahu, the hard-line leader of the rightist Likud bloc, back to power.

Dealing with just one of these crises would be a challenge for any administration. But dealing with all of them is a hugely complicated problem. In his first six months, Obama won't be able to avoid having to confront them—perhaps all at once.

### **Shifting sands**

On the positive side, an almost giddy sense of anticipation has spread globally about Obama's presidency. The rancor that marked U.S. relations with the Muslim world for the past eight years still lin-

his presidency.

But Obama has also promised to escalate the war in Afghanistan, and he has made it clear that he won't shy away from attacking al Qaeda and Taliban bases in Pakistan. Despite his openness to negotiations with Iran, he has refused to rule out the use of force to stop Iran from building a nuclear weapon. On Iraq, despite his pledge to initiate a withdrawal of American troops, he has hedged by saying that he will listen to the advice of the commanders on the ground and that he is prepared to adjust or halt the withdrawal if things go awry. And, so far at least, he has shown no inclination to step away from the litany of predictably pro-Israeli positions that he adopted during the campaign.

But trying to distinguish between his campaign rhetoric—often calculated to protect his right flank against Republican criticism—and what Obama might actually do once in office is like trying to discern patterns in shifting sands.

### **'Surge and negotiate'**

The first crisis Obama will face—provided Iraq isn't engulfed in violence early in 2009—may be in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

During the election, Obama pledged to send two to three additional U.S. brigades

year, a consensus has emerged in Europe and the Middle East that the only way out of Afghanistan is to negotiate with representatives of the Taliban—and allied right-wing Islamists and warlords—on a power-sharing deal in Kabul. That approach is beginning to sink in with U.S. officials, as well as with Obama's advisers.

But Gen. David Petraeus, the head of U.S. Central Command, believes that before any negotiations can take place, the military must stabilize Afghanistan. As in Iraq, Petraeus has proposed a surge of up to 20,000 more U.S. troops in that country.

In interviews, many of Obama's Afghan advisers have accepted the idea of a "surge and negotiate" strategy.

"I don't see that you have any credible chance of persuading even a small number of Taliban to break," says Bruce Riedel, who led Obama's task force on Pakistan and Afghanistan. "They think they're winning, and if you look at the numbers, you can make a pretty convincing case."

But more troops isn't the answer. By escalating the war, the United States is likely to enflame the situation, strengthening the insurgency. Many Afghan watchers consider the war unwinnable, pointing out that in the '80s, the Soviet Union had far more troops engaged in a brutal counterinsurgency war, and lost.

British Ambassador Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, in a cable leaked in early October, warned against precisely the escalation that Obama and Petraeus advocate: "It is the American presidential candidates who must be dissuaded from getting further bogged down in Afghanistan. [Sending more troops] would have perverse effects: It would identify us even more strongly as an occupation force and would multiply the targets [for the insurgents]."

British Brig. Gen. Mark Carleton-Smith told the *Sunday Times of London* on Oct. 6: "We're not going to win this war. ... It's about reducing [insurgency] to a manageable level that's not a strategic threat."

As a result, Great Britain and France have quietly encouraged Saudi Arabia to host talks involving former Taliban and representatives of the Afghan and Pakistani governments.

Nearly all of Obama's Afghan advisers recognize that the war won't be won militarily. They've advocated for regional diplomatic efforts to negotiate a settlement—possibly one underwritten by powers such as India, Russia and even Iran—and for stepped-up economic aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

But in the meantime, Obama's commitment to beefing up U.S. forces in Af-

ghanistan could worsen that war. And unless Pakistan is handled with extreme care, that country could explode, as well.

## A shaky Pakistan

Pakistan faces a crippling economic crisis, and it is ruled by a shaky civilian government that could fail, precipitating the fifth military coup d'état in five decades.

By demanding that Pakistan escalate the war in its Islamist-dominated tribal areas, and by striking repeatedly across the Afghan border into Pakistan against Taliban and al Qaeda sanctuaries there, Obama will run the risk of destabilizing Pakistan by alienating the government from the population, which deeply resents America's role.

Pakistan's government is trapped between its own army and U.S. pressure to crack down on militants in remote tribal areas in the northwest. For half a century, the Pakistani army and its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) directorate has been a fiefdom independent of civilian control, and so far, Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari—the widower of the murdered former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto—has been unable to wrest control of national security from the army-ISI bloc. The ISI, in turn, has long supported Islamist militancy. In

the '90s, the ISI fostered the Taliban as a tool to dominate Afghanistan. And Indian and U.S. intelligence reports suggested the ISI might have had a role in the Mumbai terrorist attacks in late November.

For the United States, the only practical solution in Pakistan is to step back, allow the civilian government to build credibility and to gain traction, while letting the army know that Washington will not support yet another coup d'état.

But the cross-border attacks rile up Pakistan's population and make the civilian government look weak and feckless. Rather than squeezing Pakistan by pressuring Islamabad to join the U.S. war on terrorism, Obama needs to ease the pressure and give Pakistan room to solve its own problems.

## The players

Obama's national security team, announced on Dec. 1, is a mostly conservative, centrist and pro-military group, reinforcing the idea that, except perhaps in Iraq, Obama isn't planning significant changes in America's posture in the Middle East. It includes Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) at the State Department, retired Marine Gen. James E. Jones as national security adviser, and President Bush's secretary of defense, Robert Gates, staying on at the Pentagon.

Jones, who served as NATO commander until 2006, pushed the alliance to extend its reach into the Middle East and Persian Gulf as part of a strategy aimed at securing oil supplies from the region. And both he and Gates have been deeply involved in plans to expand the U.S. presence in Afghanistan.

What's striking, however, about Clinton, Gates and Jones is that none of the three have been particularly close to Obama. And, among those who have been intimate advisers of the president-elect on national security, virtually none have been immersed in Middle East policy and politics during their careers.

Susan Rice, a former assistant secretary of state for African affairs, appointed by Obama to serve as ambassador to the United Nations, and Scott Gration, a retired Air Force major general and a fluent Swahili speaker, are Africa specialists.

"Rice, especially, is viewed with some suspicion in the Middle East because of



On Nov. 28 in Lahore, Pakistani demonstrators burn a U.S. flag during a protest against U.S. missile strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas.

ARIF ALI/REUTERS IMAGES

her fervent calls for intervening militarily in Darfur,” says one veteran Middle East specialist, in an interview just after Obama’s election.

Others in the inner circle of Obama’s foreign policy team are Richard Danzig, a former secretary of the Navy; Anthony Lake, who was President Clinton’s national security adviser; and Gregory

White House chief of staff caused a degree of consternation.

Emanuel, an unflinching partisan for Israel, is the son of a former fighter in the anti-British terrorist group, the Irgun Zvai Leumi. Emanuel’s father, who emigrated from Israel and now lives in a Chicago suburb, caused a stir when he commented on his son’s appointment.

niew Brzezinski, President Carter’s national security adviser, or Robert Malley, who was part of President Clinton’s Middle East team—strayed from Obama’s campaign line, they were exiled.

Still, in speaking with a range of former State Department officials, Arab diplomats, and regional experts, the consensus is that Obama, the president, may be more

## Obama’s national security team is mostly a centrist and pro-military group, reinforcing the idea that, with the possible exception of Iraq, he isn’t planning any significant changes.

Craig, a lawyer who was part of President Clinton’s defense team during impeachment. None of them have a reputation for their Middle East expertise.

Two others are Denis McDonough—a former aide to Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota—and Mark Lippert—the chief foreign policy aide on Obama’s Senate staff. Neither one has a background in the Middle East and South Asia (although Lippert, a reserve lieutenant in the Navy SEALs, served in Iraq in 2007 and 2008).

On foreign affairs, Obama trusts no one as much as, perhaps, Lippert. According to those who’ve worked closely with him, Lippert is a conservative, cautious centrist who often pulled Obama to the right on Iran, Iraq and the Middle East, and who has been a consistent advocate for increased defense spending.

“Even before Obama announced for the presidency, Lippert wanted Obama to be seen as tough on Iran,” says a lobbyist who has worked the Iran issue on Capitol Hill. “He’s clearly more hawkish than [Obama].”

During the campaign, after Obama declared his readiness to meet with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Lippert was among several Obama advisers who urged the Illinois senator to backpedal, sources say. “He wanted Obama to pull back, but it was Obama himself who said no,” says one insider, an Iran specialist.

In the Arab world, Obama’s appointment of Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.), former Clinton chief of staff, as his

“Obviously he will influence the president to be pro-Israel,” he told a reporter. “Why wouldn’t he be? What is he, an Arab? He’s not going to clean the floors of the White House.” (Afterward, Emanuel was forced to apologize to an Arab-American organization for his father’s racist comments.)

Most worrying to Obama-watchers is adviser Dennis Ross. In the ’80s, Ross helped found the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the hawkish, pro-Israel lobbying group. In the ’90s, he served as Clinton’s special envoy to the Middle East. Since then, Ross has been at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a neoconservative research group closely tied to the Israeli right.

“Over the past 12 years, he’s played an incredibly destructive role when it comes to the issue of Palestine,” says a leading Arab scholar.

Last summer, Ross helped write Obama’s speech to AIPAC.

“As president, I will never compromise when it comes to Israel’s security,” Obama said, stating that he will sign a memorandum of understanding to provide Israel with \$30 billion in military aid over the next 10 years to “ensure Israel’s qualitative military advantage.” He promised never to negotiate with Hamas and Hezbollah, and added that while he will talk to Iran, “I will always keep the threat of military action on the table.”

Throughout the campaign, Obama never veered from orthodoxy in support of Israel. When advisers—such as Zbig-

even-handed than Obama, the candidate.

“I’m very optimistic,” says Jeremy Ben-Ami, executive director of J Street, a peace-oriented Jewish group. Like many others, Ben-Ami discounts much of Obama’s campaign boilerplate as rhetoric designed to appeal to conservative Jewish voters.

Part of that optimism is because two of Obama’s key advisers on the Middle East are seen as fair in their approach: Daniel Kurtzer, an Orthodox Jew who served as ambassador to Egypt and Israel, and Dan Shapiro, a former National Security Council official and ex-Capitol Hill staffer. Both are highly regarded in Washington as moderate and sensitive to the nuances of Middle East talks.

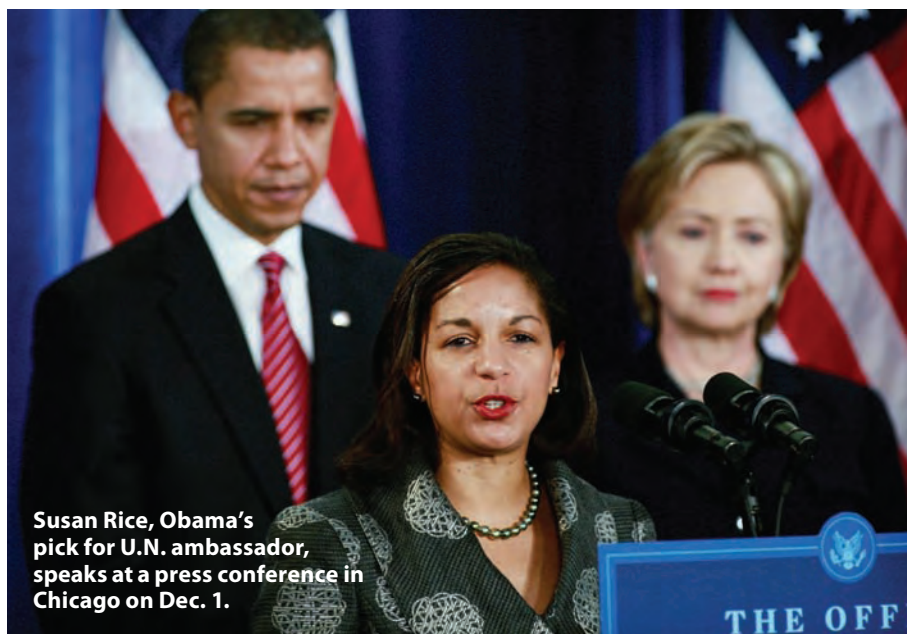
“I have the highest regard for Dan Kurtzer,” says David Mack of the Middle East Institute, an Arabist-leaning think tank in Washington, who is a former U.S. ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. “He’s in the top 10 of people I worked with.”

In an interview held before Obama’s victory, Shapiro told *In These Times* that Obama will take an activist role in seeking to broker a deal in Palestine.

“He’s committed to a much more energetic form of helping Israel and the Palestinians reach an agreement,” Shapiro says. He adds that Obama would also step in to assist the peace talks between Israel and Syria. “The Palestinians need a state that is contiguous and cohesive and the ability to chart their own destiny,” Shapiro says.

One issue that remains radioactive within the Obama camp is what to do





Susan Rice, Obama's pick for U.N. ambassador, speaks at a press conference in Chicago on Dec. 1.

the surge hasn't healed the deep divisions within Iraq among competing power blocs and militias. And Iran, which has accumulated huge influence inside Iraq, might choose to abandon its current stabilizing role in Iraq and, instead, fuel more violence there as a way of putting pressure on the United States.

The private views of most of Obama's inner circle of advisers aren't well known. But during the campaign, he assembled a group of 10 to 20 experts and outside advisers on Iraq, and their views are diverse.

Perhaps the clearest divide is between people such as Larry Korb and Brian Katulis at the Center for American Progress—who supported an unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Iraq, including all military trainers and counterterrorist units—and people like Colin Kahl at the more centrist Center for a New American Security, who wants the withdrawal to be conditional, tied to politics and security in Iraq, and who has proposed leaving 50,000 to 70,000 troops in Iraq for at least several more years.

Obama's website endorses the need for some of these so-called residual forces, although he has been vague on specifics. And, though his early policy seemed to endorse the idea of an unconditional withdrawal, Obama later suggested that he's open to the notion of adjusting or halting the withdrawal if violence escalates again in Iraq.

Because of his campaign pledges, Obama may feel compelled to carry out his withdrawal plans. If so, he will need all the political support he can get from the many millions of antiwar voters who cast their ballot for him. He will also need to accompany the withdrawal with a skillful diplomatic effort to persuade Iraq's factions to reconcile, as well as a parallel effort to work with Iraq's neighbors—including Iran and Syria—to support the emergence of a truly independent and stable Iraq, free of the U.S. occupation.

All in all, it's a tall order, and it's hard to know where to begin. In the end, it may not be up to President Obama, since one or another of the crises in the Middle East and South Asia may force him to start there.

A year from now, fixing the economy may look like the easier of Obama's challenges. ■

about Hamas. In the 2006 election, the group won the right to govern the Palestinian Authority (PA), and then it seized control of the Gaza Strip in a mini-civil war with Fatah, the mainstream leadership of the PA and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Obama has given no hint that he would talk to Hamas.

But another Obama adviser, John Brennan, a long-time CIA officer who headed the National Counterterrorism Center, suggests that once the election dust settles, Obama might very well be prepared to talk not only to Hamas, but also to Hezbollah, the Iran-backed organization that is angling for power in Lebanon, as well. Brennan, who had the inside track to become a top intelligence official under Obama, dropped out of the running in late November.

In the end, however, it may be Iraq that trips up President Obama.

## Political risks

Perhaps no other campaign pledge by the president-elect is as well known as his commitment to withdraw U.S. forces on a timetable, pulling out one to two brigades of combat forces every month. That's roughly compatible with the timetable that many Iraqi leaders, including Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, support, and it has been the core promise of the Obama campaign since 2007. He used his antiwar stand effectively against Clinton in the primaries,

and, against Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), Obama was clearly seen as the dove. Voters who strongly opposed the Iraq War voted 8 to 1 for Obama, according to exit polls.

But toward the end of the campaign, Obama downplayed his exit strategy for Iraq. And because the financial crisis emerged as issue number one for most voters, it might complicate Obama's ability to claim that the election was a mandate for his Iraq policy.

The question of Obama's mandate on Iraq is important because Obama will face enormous pressure to back down from his pledge. That pressure will come from the military, including Petraeus, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Gen. Ray Odierno, the U.S. commander in Iraq. It will also come from Democratic Party hawks, conservatives and neoconservatives in the GOP, think tanks, and editorial boards at the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*. And Robert Gates, who presided over the 2007-2008 "surge" of U.S. forces in Iraq, is likely to counsel Obama to go slow when it comes to withdrawing combat forces.

Obama will also have to confront serious political risks. If he begins to withdraw forces and the unstable situation in Iraq blows up, he will have to weather withering criticism that he squandered the gains supposedly achieved during the 2007-2008 surge.

But those gains are mostly illusory, as

# Chávez Wins Again

Venezuelans continue to support socialist leader despite corruption fears

BY STEVE ELLNER

**C**ARACAS, VENEZUELA—THE RESULTS of the Nov. 23 state-municipal elections dashed the opposition's hopes that Venezuela has become fed up with President Hugo Chávez. Chávez's United Socialist Party (PSUV) took 17 of the nation's 22 governorships, 80 percent of the mayoral posts and all but three state legislatures. The achievement of an absolute majority of the popular vote by the Chavistas—or Chávez supporters—after 10 years in power is impressive. It shows that the president has found the formula for maintaining high levels of popularity over an extended period of time.

In another plus for the Chavistas, voter turnout surpassed 65 percent—20 percentage points higher than the last state-municipal election in 2004. Such participation helps debunk the claim that Chávez is installing an authoritarian regime.

However, it wasn't all good news for the Chavistas. Opposition leaders and some of the media highlighted Chávez defeats in Miranda, Zulia, Carabobo, the nation's most populated states, as well as in the capital city of Caracas. The losses might force Chávez to slow down the pace of change and force the PSUV to analyze its errors.

Chávez was first elected president in 1998. The Chavistas won all 10 local, state and national elections held between then and December 2007—when his proposed 69-article constitutional reform was defeated in a national referendum. Chávez's far-reaching changes during this decade include nationalization of strategic sectors of the economy, increased spending for the poor, closer relations with Russia and China at the expense of U.S. ties, and a hard line within OPEC, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.



On Nov. 23, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez (center) waves to supporters in Caracas before entering a polling station to vote in the state and municipal elections.

## The broader focus

From the election's outset, national—and even international—issues overshadowed local ones. In September, Chávez expelled the U.S. ambassador in solidarity with Bolivian President Evo Morales, who had done the same the previous day, as a way to protest intervention in internal affairs. Chávez also announced that security forces had just uncovered an assassination plot against him.

But the opposition showed little sympathy for Chávez. On Nov. 18, the secretary general of Un Nuevo Tiempo party (UNT), Gerardo Blyde, who was elected mayor of Caracas' municipality of Baruta, chided Chávez for "turning the race into a plebiscite over his rule." Blyde added that "Chávez's obsession that someone is trying to kill him diverts attention from the dreadful performance

of his local elected officials."

Intentional or not, Chávez had good reason to focus attention on broader national issues and away from the local arena. His popularity far surpasses that of the leading politicians of his movement.

Chávez's hyperactive role was also designed to make clear to his followers the party loyalties of individual candidates. In the states of Barinas, Carabobo and Guárico—as well as the cities of Barcelona, Caracas and elsewhere—candidates for mayor and governor who had not been chosen to run on the Chavista ticket defected from Chávez's movement. Chávez called the pro-Chavista Communist Party and the Homeland for All Party (PPT) "counter-revolutionary" because they divided the vote by running their own candidates in various states.

Chávez warned that the opposition



would use any space gained in the elections as a staging ground to mobilize the population against his rule. Indeed, the clashes and shooting of innocent people that led to the short-lived 2002 coup against Chávez was made possible by the opposition's control of the mayoral government of Caracas.

Chávez's followers now fear that the surprising triumph of the zealously anti-Chavista Antonio Ledezma in the mayoral elections of metropolitan Caracas, which includes the capital's six municipalities, may undermine stability. Ledezma, who received 52 percent of the vote, defeated the Chavista politician Aristóbulo Istúriz.

The stakes of the electoral contests were high for another reason. Had the opposition made greater inroads, it would have been well positioned to campaign for a recall election against Chávez. At the same time, the Chavista governor of the state of Anzoátegui, Tarek William Saab, declared at a September rally kicking off his re-election campaign: "Our victories throughout the state and the nation will be stepping stones to the passage of a constitutional amendment allowing Chávez to re-run for office." One week after the election, Chávez announced his intention to modify the constitution to allow him to seek another term in 2012.

### Failures at the local level

During the campaign, the opposition

seized on the Chávez government's inefficiency and failure to solve problems at the local level—ranging from deficient garbage collection to the poor quality of public works to crime. Pompeyo Márquez, a former Communist leader who has emerged as an opposition spokesman, attacked Chávez's "socialist model" as unviable and argued that it employs "obsolete categories, such as improvised state-takeovers, centralism and communal arrangements." He went on to tell opposition candidates to "prepare to govern with efficacy and orderliness."

In this sense, Chávez's rule differs from leftist-run municipal governments and trade unions in many parts of the world. The former Italian Communist Party's message during the several decades it controlled Rome and other city governments was essentially, "Regardless of what you think of our ideology, we do a better job than our opponents in keeping the streets clean."

In contrast, many Venezuelans who are attracted to Chávez's lofty ideals, nationalist rhetoric and social concerns chafe at some of the concrete results of his rule. Between 70 and 80 percent of Venezuelans consider lack of personal security their major concern, a problem that became critical two decades ago and has grown worse. According to criminologist Alexis Romero, the increase in violent crimes over the recent past has far surpassed that of nonviolent felonies.

These downsides may be inevitable given Chávez's experimental road to change (See "The Trial (And Errors) of Hugo Chávez," September 2007). One reason for the administrative snags is that the government inherited a state bureaucracy staffed by many people who are adamantly opposed to the radical changes under way. The public administration is now filled with Chavista loyalists, some of whom lack experience.

A number of Chavista leaders attribute electrical power failures, food shortages and poor administrative performance to intentional sluggishness among employees belonging to the opposition and sabotage. Caracas Mayor Freddy Bernal observed, "Each time we are nearing elections, there is an 'operation slowdown' of garbage collection."

The opposition considers such accusations a cover-up for incompetence. But given the shortages and alleged sabotage during the attempt to oust Chávez in 2002 and 2003, and the expressions of contempt and animosity toward the government routinely conveyed by members of the opposition, Bernal's allegation is not farfetched. Nevertheless, the problem does not speak well for the efficiency and administrative capacity of the Chavistas.

### Priorities and tradeoffs

The opposition's claim that Chávez reduced the elections to a referendum over his own popularity misses the point. The president's social programs, which local Chavista candidates ardently supported and which municipal and state governments help finance, heavily influenced voters' preferences.

The social programs—such as education, healthcare and food distribution, which are referred to as "missions"—reach out to millions of the underprivileged and operate at a fraction of the cost of the same services provided elsewhere. Voters back these programs, even though in some cases they sacrifice quality in favor of quantity. Lina Gfeller, who is a principal in one of the education "missions" in the eastern city of Barcelona, says "the enormous popularity of the missions, even among some





middle-class people, shows how much support there is for the proposition that education and health should be free and open to all."

A makeshift university program called "Sucre Mission" offers evening courses in public schools throughout the country. Lacking library facilities, few teachers assign reading from books, so students of all majors carry out assignments in the community, such as designing public works projects that are then used to apply for grants. For the first time since it was founded in 2003, 30,000 Sucre Mission students were awarded university diplomas in 2008, while 100,000 receive small stipends to help them continue their studies.

Chavista candidates hail this program along with the other "missions," such as the literacy campaign for the nation's 1.5 million illiterates and the Ribas Mission for adult high school students. Caracas candidate and former Education Minister Aristóbulo Istúriz, speaking with the president of the Ribas Mission at a student graduation ceremony at the outset of the campaign, stated: "Each one of these graduations constitutes an important event for the revolution; they highlight universalization of rights."

The most recent and innovative program injects state money into community councils, which design and execute their own public works projects. Twenty-seven thousand councils have sprung up over the last three years mainly among non-privileged sectors of the population. Common priority projects, which are ratified in neighborhood assemblies, include the construction of roads, sidewalks, community houses and family housing. The community councils insist that companies contracted for these projects employ residents of the same neighborhood when possible.

In September 2007, Chávez decreed federal matching funds for all municipal and gubernatorial grants for community council projects. From a cost-benefit perspective, the program is open to criticism. The money allotted could undoubtedly reap better immediate results in the hands of private contractors. But the councils promote the Chavista goal of popular par-

ticipation in decision-making.

## **Has the opposition evolved?**

Public opinion surveys indicate that social programs are the most popular feature of Chávez's rule. This popularity has undoubtedly influenced some opposition leaders to pledge themselves to continue the missions. Manuel Rosales, who had

## **Many Venezuelans are attracted to Chávez's lofty ideals, nationalist rhetoric and social concerns, but they are beginning to chafe at some of the concrete results of his rule.**

run against Chávez in the 2006 presidential elections—and who was elected mayor of Maracaibo this time around—assured mission students that their stipends of about \$100 U.S. per month would not be endangered. Nevertheless, several years ago the pro-opposition Medical Federation of Venezuela went to the courts in an attempt to expel from the country the 15,000 Cuban doctors who staff much of the health mission program.

During the campaign, opposition leaders made a concerted effort to focus on local problems and avoid incessant references to Chávez. This strategy broke with the past when the opposition seemed obsessed with Chávez's personality. In this respect, it has come a long way since 2002 to 2004, when it promoted a coup, an indefinite general strike and even street warfare. In 2005, it boycotted congressional elections and, in the weeks leading up to the 2007 referendum, some of its members shut down highways and threatened post-election insurgency.

But opposition leaders continue to call Chávez authoritarian, to criticize all of his words and actions (the educational "missions" being an exception), and to warn of the danger of Castro Communism.

As has been the case since the outset of the Chávez presidency, the opposition still lacks a program that defines its strategy. It has yet to demonstrate how it would avoid a return to the misguided rule that preceded Chávez's advent to power when corruption and social in-

equality intensified.

This failure may be a mixed blessing. It avoids infighting between the opposition's parties—such as between Primero Justicia (Justice First), which supports explicitly conservative economic policies, and others that attempt to demonstrate greater concern for social problems. But unlike the Chavistas—who held primaries in

which 2.5 million voters chose their candidates for governor and mayor—the opposition's candidates were selected largely by political elites. Some opposition politicians objected to the unfair role played by TV magnate Alberto Federico Ravell of "Globovisión" in favor of the candidates of the UNT headed by Manuel Rosales and Gerardo Blyde.

## **What's ahead?**

Since assuming power in 1998, Chávez has followed electoral victories by implementing popular, radical measures. This time, however, his triumph was less than absolute and he is now subject to financial restraints as a result of falling oil prices.

To maintain the momentum of his rule, Chávez could crack down on corrupt government officials, including Chavista ones. The Chavista rank and file—as well as the Venezuelan population—has long clamored for action along these lines. And during the campaign, Chávez threatened to purge his government and party of self-serving members. This is not the first time Chávez has announced these intentions. But history demonstrates that Venezuelans are less tolerant of corruption during periods of economic downturn, such as what the nation now faces, than in years of oil-induced bonanza.

During the past 10 conflict-ridden years, Chávez's bold initiatives in the aftermath of victories have never failed to invigorate his movement. The coming year is unlikely to be an exception. ■

# PULP FRICTION

## A private equity firm's decision to shut down a profitable paper mill devastates a Wisconsin community

BY ROGER BYBEE

**T**HE VILLAGE OF KIMBERLY, on the northern edge of Lake Winnebago in the Wisconsin Fox Valley, epitomizes the small, almost idyllic Midwestern town.

Kimberly is a hybrid of the nostalgic past and the fast-paced present—from its old-fashioned soda fountain at a local pharmacy to its standard modern shopping mall. It has two elementary schools, a middle school and a high school. Every three years, the community's Sunset Point Park hosts an international softball championship series. Fierce loyalty to the Packers in nearby Green Bay is visible, with the football team's flags and banners fluttering throughout the community.

The heart of this 6,000-person community is a single employer: a paper mill originally founded by the Kimberly-Clark Corporation in 1889, and bought in December 2007 by Ohio-based NewPage, a subsidiary of New York-based private equity firm Cerberus Capital Management.

The mill has driven Kimberly's economy and—with the help of United Steelworkers Local 2-9—has sustained its middle-class lifestyle. It has also provided Kimberly its sense of civic identity. Even the town's high school team mascots are called the Papermakers.

But the mill and the community have collided with Cerberus' obsession with extracting maximum profits from paper sales rather than continuing the production of paper. On Sept. 8, the Kimberly



plant—which had been regarded as one of Wisconsin's most advanced and productive paper mills—shut its doors. Cerberus subsidiary NewPage, which oversaw operations at the plant, cited an excess of coated paper on the market. As a result, 600 people lost their jobs, each one having worked at the mill for at least 28 years.

### Supply and command

The aim of traditional capitalism was to generate profits over the long term from the production of goods and services. But the increasingly globalized U.S. economy has shifted executives' focus onto short-

term profits without regard to the long-term future of productive facilities or their workers. While workers have seen jobs outsourced overseas to low-wage labor, the sight of a technologically advanced plant being shut down appears senseless.

"This wasn't like the usual scenario we've seen again and again," says Andy Nirschl, president of United Steelworkers Local 2-9, "where corporations move jobs to Mexico or China to increase their profits by paying less than a dollar an hour. This is a case of a corporation taking a productive, profitable plant and closing it, and refusing to sell it to anyone else."

In 2007, the Kimberly plant earned a \$66 million profit under its former owner, paper and pulp manufacturer Stora Enso, according to the company's meetings with the union, Nirschl says.

Cerberus bought an 80 percent share of Stora Enso's paper plants for \$2.5 billion in December 2007. But of the 12 plants NewPage owned at the start of 2008, at least four were targeted for closing almost immediately after purchase. The Kimberly closing was announced in late July. NewPage still operates four other Wisconsin operations.

By forcing the Kimberly plant's closure, Cerberus is reducing the supply of coated paper, thereby controlling supply and demand, and maximizing profits, says a labor economist familiar with the case. In other words, by reducing the coated-paper supply, the company can drive up the price that its eight U.S. plants can charge.

"The strategy is flawed," says the economist. "This space [the reduction in supply from Kimberly] will be taken up by imports. We've seen a long history of U.S. corporations giving ground to make short-term money, and it's always been profoundly flawed."

NewPage cites rising costs and a down-

turn in demand to justify the shutdown.

"Since January, the demand for our products is off significantly due to the poor economy, down roughly 12 percent in the first half of [2008]," says company spokeswoman Shawn Hall. "We are experiencing unprecedented inflationary pressure that we cannot overcome through short-term productivity gains—rapidly rising, volatile

investing capital directly into purchased firms—can "turbo-charge the returns for private equity funds," the economist explains. At the same time, however, "private equity firms also take on a high risk if prices drop or the economy turns downward and they still have to pay off the debt," he says. "It's a high-risk, high-return approach."

**'This wasn't like the usual scenario we've seen again and again. This is a case of a corporation taking a productive, profitable plant and closing it, and refusing to sell it to anyone else.'**

inflationary costs for energy, raw material and transportation."

But as the labor economist notes, NewPage admits the growing competition from Chinese-based paper firms and yet the closing surrenders more market share to imports.

Private equity firms are particularly concerned with quick returns because they typically purchase under-valued companies with small amounts of capital. Using debt as collateral—rather than

### One big family

The Kimberly closing was a devastating blow to workers, whose years of experience were key to the plant's success.

"It was like family," says Sue Anderson, who put in 31 years at the mill. "So many people had been there for so long together. It hurts. They [NewPage] threw it in our face like it didn't matter to them. All your hard work all those years meant nothing."

The Anderson family's ties to the plant spanned 75 years. Sue's father retired after

## THE MECHANICS OF PRIVATE EQUITY FIRMS

Private equity firms like Cerberus Capital Management—owner of the recently closed Kimberly, Wis., paper mill—have gained enormous attention in recent years because of their growing role in the U.S. economy. These firms have gobbled up well-known companies, such as Neiman Marcus, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Toys "R" Us, Chrysler, Linens 'N Things and Whole Foods, among others.

Many of these firms claim to streamline the operations of under-performing firms. But Nomi Prins, author of *Jacked and Other People's Money* and a former managing director at Goldman Sachs and Bear Stearns, says private equity firms care only about "flipping companies and spawning whatever they can at a privately taxed bracket."

They have found many allies in Congress, including Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), a member of the Senate Banking Committee. In 2007, the *New York Times*

described the private equity and hedge-fund industry as "an important part of [Schumer's] constituency in New York."

Schumer raised \$2 million in campaign cash for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee from the industries in the first half of 2007. The senator, a self-styled foe of "plutocrats," blocked efforts—led by members of his own party—to more than double the taxes on the enormous profits reaped by industry executives. But under the weight of the ongoing economic crisis, even Schumer may feel pressure to allow some degree of regulation of them.

Schumer defended his opposition to the tax increase, telling the *Times* in June 2007, "If enacted federally, it would also lead to an increase in New York State tax that would further bear down on the industry." He said he worried that the industry was being unfairly singled out.

But Prins tells *In These Times* that private equity firms' "first concern is to cut costs, and that means cutting workers, and closing plants." She says these buy-outs "almost never benefit workers."

"Private equity funds have no real responsibility to the company they are buying," she says. "They have no responsibility to anything within the company. ... Their interest is to get in and out as quickly as possible."

Equity firms use debt as collateral to manage the purchase of corporations. Private equity funds are similar to better-known hedge funds, with the key distinction that private equity goes after brick-and-mortar companies, while hedge funds trade paper assets, such as stocks, commodities and derivatives.

Many critics say profits from private equity funds are based chiefly on special tax breaks and a strategy known as "asset





44 years at the mill.

Steelworkers' Nirschl says NewPage and Cerberus are determined to keep the plant closed, even spurning offers by other corporations to buy the facility and keep it operating.

"Our village administrator has heard from three companies that are interested in buying the plant, and the union has been contacted by another potential buyer," he says. "But even if a new owner wouldn't make a competitive product, [NewPage officials] say it's not for sale."

Spokeswoman Hall says the company has "not heard from" these prospective buyers.

On Sept. 24, several Wisconsin legislators—Democratic Sens. Herb Kohl and

Russ Feingold, and Reps. Tom Petri (R) and Steve Kagan (D)—met with NewPage President Mark Suwyn to persuade him to keep the Kimberly plant running or to sell it to someone who would. Suwyn told the lawmakers that the company is willing to lease the plant to a non-competing firm.

But Nirschl challenges that claim: "If they're going to lease the plant, who is out publicizing that?" he asks. "They won't be able to lease it unless they're letting companies know it's available and are actively marketing it."

Asked if the company has a marketing plan for the plant, NewPage's Hall responded, "No."

### Not without a fight

The mill closing has left Kimberly fighting for its life. Hundreds of yard signs that read "Run It or Sell It" dot the local landscape, a challenge to NewPage. The signs seem a bit incongruous in a solidly middle-class town of tree-lined streets and well-kept homes.

"People take a great deal of pride in their property and vehicles, and have the money from the mill to maintain them," says Village Administrator Rick Hermus, whose grandfather, father and three brothers worked at the Kimberly mill, with his

brothers among the victims of the closing.

"Run It or Sell It" messages have even appeared on electronic billboards run by the local credit union and other businesses.

The community seems to recognize that its affluence has been built on the union's strength and that its future depends on the workers' ability to pressure NewPage.

On Sept. 6—two days before the plant closed its doors—the Steelworkers sponsored a rally that drew an estimated 5,000 people in support.

"To paraphrase Dylan Thomas: We cannot lock up and go quietly into that good night," union Vice President Jon Geenen said at the rally. "We cannot watch industry after industry leave with no industry to replace them."

On Nov. 15, the union founded "Camp Kimberly," an area across the street from the quiet NewPage paper mill. There, former mill workers are holding daily vigils to demand executives re-open the mill or sell it to a new owner.

Steelworkers have also held vigils and more demonstrations locally and at the State Capitol, meeting with elected officials and forging alliances with NewPage customers and the local business community.

stripping"—laying off employees, raiding existing pension funds, eliminating future pension and health benefits, and selling off portions of a business—all of which can reap returns of 30 percent to 40 percent.

With the absence of regulation, private equity firms have five major advantages:

**1) Leveraging debt for profit:** The more debt used to buy a company, the greater the opportunity for a big return on investment. This is because the initial cash put into the purchase by the private equity fund is so small. Typically, private equity funds use the value of the company they are purchasing as collateral, which means their cash outlay is relatively minor.

**2) Tax exemption on debt:** On top of that, private equity firms can claim favorable tax treatment on the debt they carry, Prins notes.

**3) Big tax break on sale of properties:** Profits from the operations of a private

equity firm—or selling a company after it has been stripped of its assets—are taxed at the capital-gains rate of 15 percent, instead of the official corporate rate of 35 percent. That also places the firms at a far lower rate than many working families. Randall Dodd, in a July 2007 report for the Economic Policy Institute, estimated that this amounts to at least \$6.3 billion in annual losses in federal tax revenue.

**4) Exploiting conflicts of interest:** By offering managers of a buyout a chance to reap a lucrative payoff from the sale via inflated prices for certain stock, private equity funds are often able to persuade top executives to sell their companies at bargain rates—to the disadvantage of stockholders, pension funds and workers. These side deals are shielded from the public view by the absence of Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) disclosure requirements. They can take a public company

out of public documentation—and SEC control—and spin it off into a private company.

**5) No disclosure:** Unlike publicly traded companies, private equity firms face almost no requirements for disclosure about their holdings, executive salaries, bonuses, potential conflicts of interest, and similar data demanded of other corporations.

### Impact on others

Cerberus appears to exemplify the asset-stripping strategy. In 2006, the firm purchased GMAC—once the finance arm of General Motors (GM)—and laid off about 5,000 GMAC workers in the past two years—before GM's recent sales plunge.

Cerberus is studded with Republican luminaries who have championed financial deregulation. Its key partners include former Bush Treasury Secretary

The union also sent more than 100 workers by bus to NewPage's headquarters in Miamisburg, Ohio, a Dayton suburb. The union got pro forma responses from company officials who met with them, and the Steelworkers were pleased by the media attention generated in NewPage's backyard.

The union is also trying set up a meeting between Wisconsin lawmakers and John Snow, the CEO of Cerberus Capital Management (and former treasury secretary under President Bush).

## Facing the future

The plant's closing is having a negative impact on Kimberly and the surrounding area. The village's volunteer fire department—which depended heavily on mill workers—will likely be disbanded and replaced with a much more expensive arrangement for fire protection. The mill used to grant its volunteer firefighters time off the job to fight local fires. And with discarded workers leaving the area to find work elsewhere, the village will need to fill the void.

Tom Vandevyver, who followed his father into the paper mill and put in 31 years before the recent closing, says the economic consequences are taking their toll

on the community.

"Business at the supper club is down 20 percent to 30 percent," he says. "Myself, I haven't been out to eat in months. Right now, I'm looking at selling my new truck and my boat."

Vandevyver, a 49-year-old with gray flecks in his black hair and beard, sees little

so backed up that we still have not received all the paperwork and cannot get answers to what we qualify for or how we go about doing it."

Meanwhile, Kimberly workers also note that the programs don't address the shrinking supply of fair-wage jobs.

"Any wage you see offered out there

## The mill closing has left Kimberly fighting for its life. Hundreds of yard signs that read 'Run It or Sell It' dot the local landscape, a challenge to NewPage and Cerberus Capital Management.

cushion coming from the severance package offered by the company—26 weeks of pay and six months of health and dental coverage—or in the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) set up by lawmakers Kagen, Kohl and Feingold.

But the TAA promised benefits remain stuck in the pipeline due to cutbacks in the state's staffing of programs for dislocated workers. "There is only one TAA administrator for us," Nirschl explains. "The people—myself included—have put in calls to see what we are eligible for and to get answers, and you do not get any answer. [The TAA administrator] is

is between \$10 and \$15 an hour," says Vandevyver. (The average annual income of the workers at NewPage was about \$56,000; the job required overtime and work was regularly scheduled for weekends and holidays in order to keep the presses running.) "I'll probably wind up taking a second job, too."

He sees continuing the fight against NewPage and Cerberus as his best shot at maintaining a life with some security.

"We've got to fight to keep manufacturing in this country," Vandevyver says. "We're going from a middle-class country to just the rich and the poor." ■



**Some 5,000 Steelworkers rallied on Sept. 6, two days before Cerberus' subsidiary closed a profitable paper mill in Kimberly, Wis.**

John Snow and former Vice President Dan Quayle.

Snow is former CEO of the CSX railroad line and chair of the Business Roundtable, which, in the '90s, fought for

passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Another Cerberus superstar includes CEO Stephen Feinberg, whose 2007 compensation was a staggering \$330 million.

In 2007, Cerberus purchased about 80 percent of Chrysler, the iconic American auto firm that had merged with German firm Daimler. Cerberus is now negotiating with GM on a merger between the two floundering former powerhouses, and both Cerberus and GM are seeking federal assistance in the name of saving vital parts of the U.S. auto industry.

Some academics predict that the large fees and salaries that private equity firms and their executives collect may soon decrease in the face of growing criticism and mounting financial pressures.

Professor Josh Lerner of the Harvard Business School anticipates that trouble among private equity firms would probably "precipitate hard questions about the compensation and fee structure" in the industry. "I would not be surprised if they try to head off the criticism by returning capital," Lerner told the *Times* on Nov. 3.

But regardless of possible concessions to fend off regulation, private equity remains a mechanism for extracting maximum profit from workers and enterprises.

Stephen Lerner, director of the Service Employee's International Union's project on private equity industry, says, "The buyout business remains, at its core, a vehicle for the spectacular accumulation of wealth by the few, without regard for the impact on others."

—Roger Bybee

# Lines Drawn in the Sandinistas

## Nicaragua's democratic left chafes under President Ortega's rule

BY FRED A MOON

**O**N A DOWNTOWN STREET corner in León, Nicaragua, a young man in black carries a large wooden cross in the mid-day heat. Across his chest, a sash reads "Dictator." The cross is marked with swastikas, alongside the acronym FSLN, for Nicaragua's ruling party, the Sandinista National Liberation Front.

He is protesting against Daniel Ortega, the former guerrilla leader and current Nicaraguan president. Since his 2006 election, Ortega—always a controversial figure—has faced increased popular opposition. Today, Ortega's critics hail not only from the political right, but also from the FSLN within the ranks of his own party on the left.

Until last summer, in León—a longtime Sandinista stronghold and the country's second largest city—it seemed possible, if not probable, that the FSLN would lose November's municipal elections for the first time since the 1979 revolution. The Sandinista Renovation Movement, or MRS—a reformist, social democratic opposition party that criticizes Ortega as authoritarian and corrupt—posed a serious challenge to FSLN.

Over the last six months, the MRS, feminist leaders and other critics of the Ortega administration have encountered intimidation and physical violence, leading international organizations—such as Reporters without Borders, Human Rights Watch and the Catholic Church—to criticize the government's heavy-handed tactics. In June, the FSLN-controlled Supreme Electoral Council—which organizes the country's elections—stripped the MRS of its right to participate in the November elections, citing irregularities in the party's formation.

The MRS denies those charges. The party has filed legal challenges against the council's decision and has asked the

Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to investigate. On Nov. 25, the commission released a statement expressing concern about reports of political violence and intimidation in Nicaragua and called on the Ortega government to allow a visit by the OAS rapporteur for Nicaragua.

The MRS, which dissident Sandinistas created in 1995, argues that the electoral council should have allowed it to challenge the FSLN—as MRS candidates have in previous elections—in the Nov. 9 mayoral races that took place in 146 of Nicaragua's municipalities.

Following the council's June decision, MRS leader Dora María Téllez staged a two-week hunger strike in Nicaragua's capital Managua. Téllez—Ortega's former health minister during his first administration in the '80s, and the Sandinista *comandante* famous for helping seize the National Palace during the revolution—captured headlines with her condemna-

tions of her former comrade.

"A strike like this is not easy," she told the Nicaraguan newspaper *La Prensa*, "but here we will continue until our bodies and our forces endure, because our struggle is for democracy and Nicaraguans."

### Tensions ignite

In September, a group of MRS leaders, including Téllez, gathered in León for what members called a "pro-democracy protest." Anticipating trouble and hoping to go unnoticed, Téllez and MRS legislator Eduardo Sáenz drove into town in an unmarked sedan, rather than in the black SUVs Nicaraguan elected officials usually drive.

As they approached the city's edge, they were stopped by a group of pro-FSLN counter-protesters. One recognized Téllez and, according to Sáenz, the crowd began hurling rocks—hitting the car, but missing the windows. The car made it into town, but when they reached the meeting place, they again found themselves surrounded.



COURTESY OF FRED A MOON



This time, the crowd had weapons: mortars, sticks and Molotov cocktails, which Sáenz says they hurled at his car, igniting it as the police looked on.

Sáenz says the police stepped in only when the car was in flames. “The car was a cost,” he says. “But it was cheap. It provoked the police to react.”

Tensions between the MRS and the FSLN are particularly fierce in León, a university town where the MRS’ bright-orange headquarters was recently vandalized. Red and black spray paint—the colors of the FSLN—were scrawled across its adobe walls, reading “Viva el FSLN,” “*Traidores vende patria*” and “*Muerte a la oligarquía*.” (Translated: “Long live the FSLN,” “Traitors sellout the fatherland,” and “Death to the oligarchy.”)

### ‘Danielistas’

The MRS sees FSLN loyalists as “Danielistas” or “Orteguistas,” and its own members as true Sandinistas—who are standing up for the egalitarian, democratic values of the revolution. MRS officials say they are now fighting against the same authoritarianism that led them to overthrow the right-wing dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle. Somoza was finally ousted in 1979, but sporadic FSLN guerrilla actions—raids, hostage takings and the like—continued throughout the mid- to late-1970s.

“We’re the *only* leftist party that exists in Nicaragua,” Sáenz says. “We don’t believe the Orteguistas are leftists.”

But the MRS and its followers have also drawn criticism for their tactics. At a July party event in León, a banner displayed an image of Ortega with Somoza, declaring the men “the same thing.” At the bottom of the banner was the name of the martyred poet and composer Rigoberto López Pérez, a celebrated national hero who in 1956 assassinated Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza García—the father of Somoza Debayle.

In response, the U.S.-based Nicaragua solidarity group Nica Net wrote a letter to Sáenz, calling on him to condemn the banner. Nica Net wrote, “This apparent call for the assassination of a democratically elected president has no place in political discourse and exceeds the bounds

of legitimate political speech.”

Sáenz acknowledges having received the letter but says he doesn’t know anything about the banner, which he thought was produced by supporters and not the party.

### A war against women?

Feminist groups and nonprofits are also

## Ten days before Nicaragua’s 2006 presidential election that brought Ortega back to power, Ortega aligned himself with the Catholic Church in supporting a total ban on abortion rights.

butting heads with Ortega over abortion rights, transparency in government and corruption allegations.

Ten days before the 2006 presidential election that brought Ortega back to power after a 16-year absence, the FSLN leader aligned himself and his party with the Catholic Church in supporting a total ban on abortion rights. The ban—which overturned a Nicaraguan law dating to the 19th century allowing for abortion in cases where a woman’s life is in danger—angered many feminists.

Téllez calls Nicaragua’s abortion ban a “crime.”

Another controversy that has infuriated feminists across the region is Ortega’s alleged sexual abuse of his stepdaughter, Zoilamerica Narvaez Murillo. In 1998, Narvaez charged that Ortega had molested her for more than a decade, beginning when she was 11 and he was in his first term as president. Ortega has denied the charges and has said he believes them to be politically motivated.

In Honduras, the head of the National Institute of Women quit her job in protest after Honduras extended an official invitation to Ortega to visit the capital. And Paraguay’s minister of women’s affairs, Gloria Rubin, called Ortega a rapist and protested his invitation to the inauguration of her country’s newly elected leftist president.

In October, Nicaraguan authorities raided the offices of two prominent nonprofits, the Communications Research Center and the Autonomous Women’s

Movement. The government confiscated financial records and computer equipment with a search warrant that alleged “irregular and unusual operations with funds coming from foreign sources,” according to Reporters Without Borders, which issued a statement condemning the government’s actions. The heads of both organizations are journalists and

former Sandinistas who have been critical of the government.

### Top priority

The Ortega administration dismisses its opponents as puppets of the United States. It uses rhetoric that plays into the fear, distrust and anger many here still feel toward the United States, which supported the Somozas’ dictatorial dynasty from the 1930s until the 1979 Sandinista revolution. Even then, the U.S. government trained and funded the anti-Sandinista Contra forces during the decade-long civil war that ravaged Nicaragua in the ’80s.

While this rhetoric may be effective—and rooted in historical reality—the FSLN offers little evidence of Washington interference. MRS leaders are adamant there is none, and they seem every bit as comfortable criticizing the United States as others in the Latin American left.

In the November election, the MRS encouraged supporters to vote for the conservative Liberal Party candidate in the mayoral race in the Nicaraguan capital of Managua—one of the country’s most high-profile races.

“It was a bitter swallow, like a frog in my throat,” says Sáenz. “But it was between the bad and the worse.”

For a growing number of activists on the Nicaraguan left, Ortega and Somoza *are* the same thing, and ousting him has become a greater priority than any single policy issue. ■

# Making the Feds Model Employers

Obama must put a stop to worker abuse by private contractors

BY DAVID MOBERG

**A**LITTLE OVER A YEAR ago, roughly 500 workers assembled and sewed backpacks, safety vests and other gear for the military at the Michael Bianco Inc. factory in New Bedford, Mass. According to U.S. Attorney Michael Sullivan, they worked under “deplorable” conditions in a “typical sweatshop,” except that it was operated entirely with federal contract dollars.

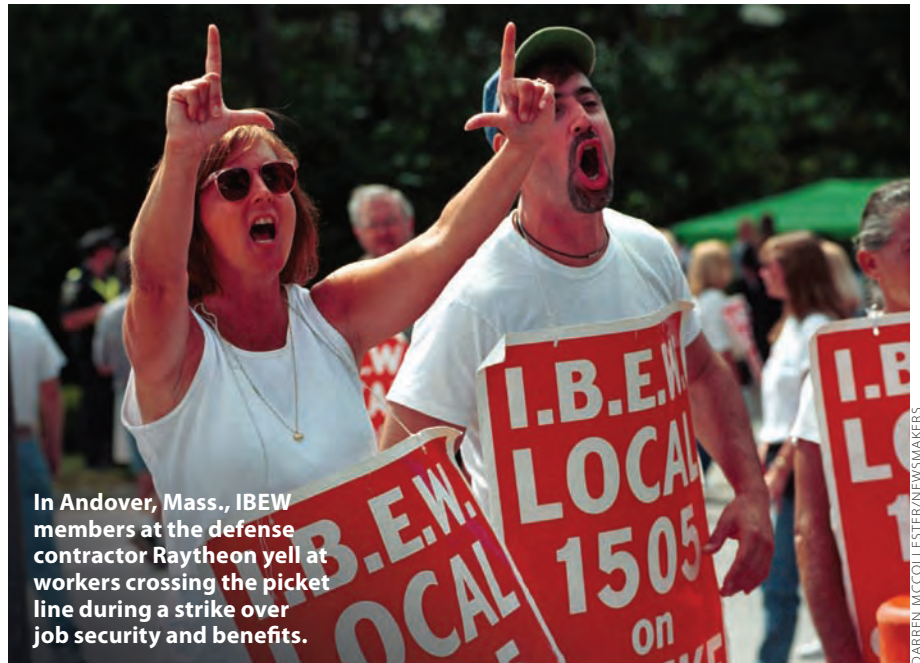
Workers nominally made \$7.20 an hour, but they typically earned less after Bianco imposed fines—such as \$20 for spending more than two minutes in the restroom (where the company limited the toilet paper), \$20 for leaving their work for break before the bell rang, and \$20 for talking to other workers.

Most workers had no health insurance and were systematically cheated out of time-and-a-half pay for their extensive overtime. Many had to rely on food stamps and other public assistance programs to survive. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration charged the factory with violating safety standards, such as operating with locked fire exits. Workers also accused the owners of inadequately heating workrooms in the winter and not ventilating them in the summer.

Bianco owner Francesco Insolia was sentenced to prison—for hiring roughly 300 undocumented workers—but the company’s new owner raised wages only modestly and made “cosmetic changes,” according to Steve Wishart of UNITE HERE, which is organizing the workers.

In 2002, the federal government directly employed less than 1.8 million civil servants and at the same time indirectly paid for more than 8 million workers through contracts and grants, according to New York University professor Paul Light.

Tom Woodruff, director of the strategic



In Andover, Mass., IBEW members at the defense contractor Raytheon yell at workers crossing the picket line during a strike over job security and benefits.

DARREN MCCOLLETER/NEWSMAKERS

organizing center of the Change to Win labor federation, says that 1 million of those contract workers earn less than \$8.20 an hour, and most of those low-wage workers receive no benefits.

## Under contract

Many in the labor movement hope President-elect Obama will take executive action early in his tenure to raise the standards and protect the rights of all workers under government contracts. They argue it’s a matter of common decency and smart economic strategy.

Under Bush, contracting out has skyrocketed—growing by 86 percent from 2000 to 2005, according to a study prepared in 2006 by the minority staff of the House Committee on Government Reform for Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.).

Federal laws—such as the 1931 Davis-Bacon Act (covering construction), the 1936 Walsh-Healey Act and the 1965

Service Contract Act—were designed to make sure that such federal contractors paid at least the prevailing wage. But these laws provide wage standards for only a third of federal contract workers. According to a 2000 Economic Policy Institute study, for many occupations covered by the laws, the prevailing wage standard pays below poverty income. And standards are routinely violated and rarely enforced.

In 2007, the Labor Department investigated 659 contractors, and discovered that 80 percent of them violated the Service Contract Act compliance standards. A *Wall Street Journal* investigation last March found that 40 percent of service contractors did not provide employees the health insurance or cash equivalent the law requires.

Toward the end of Clinton’s presidency, lawmakers and the administration offered proposals to raise standards, including a

federal “living wage” for all government contract workers, modeled on the legislation passed by about 140 cities and other local government jurisdictions across the country. In its final month, the Clinton administration amended federal acquisition regulations that required contractors to have a “satisfactory record of integrity and business ethics.” The new rule specified that they must be in “satisfactory compliance with the law, including tax, labor and employment, environmental, antitrust, and consumer protection laws.” It also prohibited contractors from using public funds to promote or deter unionization.

But business groups filed suit, and the Bush administration quickly killed the new requirements.

## The high road

While Bush blocked progress at the federal level, at the state and local level, labor and community groups around the country pushed through living wage ordinances, conditions on employment when public money subsidized projects, and sweat-free procurer laws. In many cases, governments set conditions that favored unionization—from prohibiting use of public funds for anti-union activity to favoring contractors who were more likely to guarantee labor peace.

But courts have frequently ruled that federal labor law pre-empts state and local action on many labor regulations. As a result, courts have restricted the scope of non-federal efforts to raise labor standards by encouraging collective bargaining.

At the federal level, President Bush headed in the opposite direction. For example, labor unions in recent years have promoted passage of the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), which would penalize employers for unfair labor practices when workers try to organize; recognize workers’ choice of a union when a majority sign membership authorization cards; and provide arbitration of contracts when employers balk at bargaining.

But early in the fall, Bush was preparing to issue an executive order barring any federal contractor from agreeing to union recognition with a majority card check.

Now Change to Win and other union leaders are talking with the Obama tran-

sition team about what the new administration could do. Obama has said he supports EFCA, and last summer he wrote a letter supporting organizing efforts by workers at Puerto Rican military supply contractors. So far, union leaders say the transition team seems open to action, but the unions are only asking for relatively limited, if important, changes.

## Unions are pressuring Obama to take early executive action in order to raise the standards and protect the rights of all workers under government contracts.

Joseph Geevarghese, Change to Win deputy director of strategic organizing, says the federation is not seeking a broad mandate, covering all contract workers, but “trying to be more surgical in focusing on contracts.”

That could mean targeting new standards to the 25,000 to 30,000 employees of military needle trades suppliers, who are required to be located on U.S. territory. Or it could include other work groups—such as private security guards, hotel workers for private concessionaires in national parks, cafeteria workers or janitors.

“The fundamental challenge at the end of the day is whether President Obama could issue an executive order that says he believes in following the high road, not the low road, for federal contracts,” Geevarghese says. While raising wage and benefit standards might not help unions organize, such action would reduce the downward competitive pressure on unionized employers.

“The economy has been going backwards for workers for 30 years,” says Woodruff. “A big part of getting the economy going is wage growth. ... The government’s ability to influence the private sector is huge if it chooses to be a model employer.” In total, companies with private contracts employ a total of 30 million workers.

Woodruff argues that forcing the government contracting divisions to pursue a high road could spill over to the rest of the economy as well.

“The purpose would be to do as much

as possible to pay decent wages and benefits, and not interfere with workers’ right to organize,” he says, “They can use the huge footprint of the federal government to get us out of our economic mess in the short term, but it’s also important in the long term.”

UNITE HERE’s Wishart says any new standards should provide for a living

wage—not just a prevailing wage. And he wants employer neutrality during organizing, so as to “to make the right to organize a reality”

Laphonza Butler, director of SEIU’s property services division, would like for there to be “some transparency to the system. Right now, there’s no way to tell how many workers there are or where they work.”

Although SEIU has not decided what mandate it would seek for federal security guard contracts, Butler says the union advocates “first, economic security and, second, to provide adequate training. And if that means they have to be in a union, that’s our third priority. Our federal government should be a provider of good jobs.”

The public agrees. In a September survey for Change to Win by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 86 percent of voters said “companies that consistently violate labor laws should be prevented from receiving federal contracts.” And 71 percent say contracts should be given only to companies that offer good jobs and treat workers fairly. Two-thirds of surveyed voters believed that the president should act change policy to mandate good jobs.

Making the federal government a model employer—directly and indirectly through its contracts—would be a winner morally, economically and politically. To become that model employer, Obama could buttress his stimulus plan and send a message to workers and private businesses with a simple executive decision. ■



# Which Way to Universal Healthcare?

Two leading reformers debate the role of private insurers

BY EZRA KLEIN

**T**HE NUMBERS HAVE NEVER been this grim. Almost 50 million Americans are uninsured. The average annual premium for a family is nearing \$13,000, and racing upward at rates that wages can't hope to match. If nothing changes, by 2050, government healthcare spending will consume 37 percent of the gross domestic product, and private health spending will be far more. There will be little left for education or wages or leisure.

Economists have a dictum they call Stern's Law, and it is simple: If something cannot go on forever, they say, it won't.

Our health system cannot go on in this fashion forever. It will break the back of the federal budget and crush individual consumers. But between "cannot" and "will not" lies an ocean of impediments and questions.

Some of those barriers seem to be dissolving before the moral force of the issue. For the last eight years, our government lacked either the will or the interest to act on health reform. After Jan. 20, 2009, that will no longer be true.

President-elect Barack Obama has not only stated his intention to reform healthcare, he has also staffed his administration with eager reformers, notably former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, who has written a book calling for comprehensive healthcare reform and who will serve as the administration's "health czar," as well as its Health and Human Services secretary.

But if the incoming administration has the will, few are sure of the way. It's an old debate, and a consequential one. As the saying goes, the status quo is everyone's second choice. And when you



Steffie Woolhandler and Richard Kirsch talk it out.

have reformers squabbling over what they want, and industry uniting to defeat what they don't want, the outcome is never progressive.

In an attempt to encourage dialogue in advance of the legislative battles to come, *In These Times* invited representatives from two leading reform groups—Steffie Woolhandler, co-director of Physicians for a National Health Program, and Richard Kirsch, the national campaign manager for Health Care for America Now (HCAN)—to talk out their differences. An edited transcript of their conversation follows.

**Why don't we begin with each of you giving us the "elevator pitch" of what your groups are advocating for? Steffie?**

**STEFFIE WOOLHANDLER:** Our group of more than 15,000 physicians supports single-payer national healthcare insurance. We support that because it's the only way to affordably cover all Americans. That's because single-payer allows you to generate huge administrative savings by going to a more simplified payment structure.

If you don't go with single-payer and you continue with the current system of

multiple-payers and the participation of private insurance, you continue to have tremendous administrative waste. And then the only way to get more coverage is to spend more money, and that quickly becomes economically unfeasible.

**Just so we're clear on terms, when you say "single payer," how stringent are you being? Are you talking just what Canada and England do, or are you also considering Germany and France, which have nonprofit involvement? Do they count as single-payer?**

**SW:** Germany clearly would not count as single-payer. They have multiple payers. But there are other nations that have, or have had, some form of single-payer systems, not just Canada or England. For a while, Australia had single-payer, for instance, and Taiwan has a single-payer system.

**Richard?**

**RICHARD KIRSCH:** Health Care for America Now's goal is to have a guarantee of quality, affordable healthcare for everyone in the nation. And we've come together as a coalition that includes 480 organizations that represent community groups, labor, healthcare providers and faith-based groups, among a whole variety of organizations on a common set of principles: That everyone should be covered. That the coverage should be affordable based on people's income. That the benefits should meet people's needs. That the coverage should be affordable to employers. And that, in order to do this, we need to have really strict regulation of the private health insurance industry, so that it can't continue to have a business model that drops people when they need healthcare.

We also need to give people a choice of healthcare coverage. So, in addition to keeping their own healthcare coverage, they have the choice of a public health insurance plan. Private insurance isn't the only choice. The primary goal is to look at healthcare as a public good.

The reason healthcare in this country costs so much more than in any other country is because we're the only country that treats healthcare as a commodity.

**Your opening statements demonstrate**

**a congruency in values, but obviously your approaches are different. It seems to me you each balance the politics and the policies of the issue differently. So, let me start with you, Steffie: How does single payer pass the Senate Finance Committee?**

**SW:** Well, you build a popular movement among the American people, much in the way that Obama was able

**'The reason healthcare in this country costs so much more than in any other country is because we're the only country that treats healthcare as a commodity.'**

to succeed by building a popular movement. If you'd asked me five years ago, what was more likely, passing single-payer or electing a black president, I probably would've said single-payer and you probably would've, too. But the thing that changed was a kind of populist sentiment in this country, and that's what it's going to take.

**So, Richard, what's your response? In particular, why do you let corporate insurers remain in your system?**

**RK:** First of all, our goal is to get all folks covered. A lot of people in America have their healthcare taken care of by private insurers.

My wife's a cancer survivor. She got really good care and some not-good care, and none of that had to do with the insurance. The not-good care had to do with a doctor who wasn't so good, but the insurance covered both the good doctor and the bad doctor.

There are a lot of problems with the health insurance industry and the way it functions, but it can be regulated. It's not private insurance that makes it impossible to provide access to care to people. We should remember that, even with all the frustrations that people have with it.

**SW:** These private-public types of plans fail. The TennCare plan [Tennessee's Medicaid managed care program] in 1992 did include a big public plan, so it's not correct to say that none of these efforts have included a public plan.

Similarly, the Massachusetts reform in 1988, the Oregon reform in 1992, and the Washington reform in 1993 all included substantial employer mandates. They were never fully implemented because the economics didn't work. If you don't get the administrative costs under control, you can't get advanced care.

**But these proposals fail at the state level**

**because healthcare is a countercyclical cost. States cannot deficit spend. When recessions hit, their revenues drop. But when recessions hit, more people lose their insurance and need subsidies. So at the exact moment revenues go down, costs go up. That's why the plans unravel. But it's not necessarily applicable to the federal level.**

**SW:** That's certainly true about the state level and the inability of states to deficit spend. But what the countercyclical argument doesn't get to is the explosion of healthcare costs. And that is much more the cause of their failure, and not a specific issue about money flowing into state coffers.

**RK:** As Steffie may recall, I was a leader of the single-payer movement in the early '90s. I actually co-wrote with Assemblyman Dick Gottfried—who was, and still is, the chair of the Assembly Health Committee in New York—the only fully financed single-payer bill to pass a state legislative body. (Most of the other ones that passed punted on the financing.)

I did the fiscal analysis that showed the financing. So I understand the arguments against state plans. But there is an enormous difference if we do this at the federal level. You have broad-based taxes, you can deficit spend. The financing is totally different.

**Richard, one of the arguments that Steffie is making about your proposal is that of cost-control. I'm not as concerned about the administrative costs**

as she is, but single-payer certainly has a very coherent argument about cost-control. It's essentially that we will use the market share of a single payer to force the system into being more cost-effective. There's a lot of research backing this up. What is the cost-control theory of the HCAN plan?

**RK:** There are two things: First, having a public plan that has 100 million people in it will give you a lot of the cost-control.

**But what if you don't have that? That seems to me a very speculative part of your plan. Are there any other aspects of the plan that will control costs?**

**RK:** Well, to say that the public plan is speculative is to say that any of this stuff is speculative, regulating the insurance industry, etc. But there are other things that control costs that might even be bigger lifts than the public plan.

We need to ask, "How do we start doing the other kind of changes in the system that we need, to control costs?" Part of it is, obviously, how do we get everybody in the system with prevention? How do we get better chronic care management? How do you create a system where providers have different incentives? How do you have a system where there's better value?

So, yes, let's use the public plan for its ability to have better prices for drug companies, better prices for hospitals, not have medical specialists get paid the outrageous amounts of money that they do get paid in this country—all the things Medicare tries to do.

But also, let's start having a public discussion about the really hard decisions about what we pay for. Should we be having doctors perform lots of services that have no value? Should we be paying for drugs that have no value? Those are the hard decisions that the hospitals, the doctors, the drug companies, the medical device manufacturers are going to fight tooth and nail in both a private system and in a public system, and that's ultimately where the price savings are going to have to come from.

**Steffie, let me ask you about what is maybe the most fundamental disagreement between you two. Do you think the American people might be disturbed to lose the private health-care they currently have and move toward a government system?**

**SW:** Medicare is one of the most popular social programs of all time in the United States. So it's very easy to talk in terms of Medicare, and to win people over by explaining that what we are proposing is an expanded and improved Medicare for all. Winning people over is not he problem.

Certainly, if Richard and HCAN went out with rhetoric about Medicare, they'd have no trouble signing up voters who are interested in it. But if they go out there with, "Here's our principle: We have to have private insurance," that's not going to move us forward.

**Okay, but to follow up: HCAN, for better or for worse, is a response to a long history of failure on the U.S. left to achieve universal healthcare. And that's been a failure to achieve it on a single-payer basis, which is what Truman was looking at, a failure on a hybrid basis, which is more what Clinton was looking at. I agree that HCAN is a policy compromise that is suboptimal, but it does have a certain political logic behind it.**

**SW:** Who got Obama elected? That's obviously not the same coalition that we'd need to build a movement for national health insurance, but it shows what is possible. We've had a civil rights movement that completely changed the way we think about race. We've had a women's movement that has won all sorts of victories. We had an antiwar movement that ended the war in Vietnam. So I don't understand your cynicism here about how there couldn't be a movement.

**I'm not saying that there can't be one, but I'm wondering why hasn't there been one? The catalytic figure for the movement of Barack Obama was Barack Obama. What would be the catalytic moment or figure for your movement? Single-payer as an idea has been around for an extremely long time, but the movement hasn't achieved a sufficient amount of power to pass it. So what has been wrong in the past that will be right in the future? Why can it succeed now when it has failed before?**

**SW:** Right before the Clinton plan, the thing that changed was the election of Sen. Harris Wofford (D-Pa.). He was elected on a single-payer platform almost by accident. It was only one aspect of his plan, and then his opponent, Dick Thornburgh, decided to attack him as being a single-payer supporter, and Wofford was elected to the Senate based on Thornburgh's attacks.

Now, *that* I could not have predicted. But in a general way, I can predict that when important elections are won

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and lost on this issue, then it'll be like a lightning bolt coming from the sky. The political scene can change very, very rapidly.

**RK:** But Steffie, what you just said totally makes an HCAN point. Because Barack Obama was elected on a promise to fix healthcare in a certain way. One of his ads showed two extremes—government health insurance at one extreme, all private health insurance at the other extreme—and he said, “I’m not at either extreme, I’m in the middle.” What he said in his messaging at every debate was, “Under my plan, you can keep your own health insurance or you can have a choice of other health insurance.” He was elected on exactly the kind of mandate Steffie’s talking about.

That’s what the election was all about. It wasn’t for single-payer. It was for this bold promise to the American public to have a guarantee of quality, affordable healthcare from a choice of either private or public insurance and know that you’re going to get good benefits that are affordable. That’s the mandate we have.

**Steffie, is there any intermediate proposal between here and single-payer that would be a step in the right direction?**

**SW:** If you’re going to do something

incremental, I would start with single-payer for hospital care. All hospitals would get their budget from a single-payer, and hospitals would no longer send bills or do health accounting to individual patients, but would be budgeted. That at least gets you a substantial amount of administrative savings and increases the fairness of the system. It also allows you to do better

**‘Barack Obama was elected on a promise to fix healthcare in a certain way. That’s what the election was all about, and that’s the mandate that we have.’**

health planning.

There’s not a lot of talk about that as an incremental step, but that’s the one incremental step that makes sense.

**Richard, a lot of what you said today has been reliant on the idea of the public plan, but my congressional reporting suggests that one plausible outcome for your plan is that when you try to get to 60 votes in the Senate, the public plan gets bargained away. Is the public plan a bottom line? If the public plan vanishes, but the rest of the plan is structurally similar to your principles, is that a plan that’s beneath**

**the level of acceptability? Is that a plan that therefore merits opposition?**

**RK:** We haven’t as a coalition had a discussion yet about how we look at this whole plan when it passes, and what’s acceptable and what is not.

We’re a long way policy-wise and politically—although maybe not that long on the calendar, potentially only nine or

so months—of seeing something enacted. But we’re not there yet, so we’re just going to fight in every way for the best system that is achievable.

We’re glad we got President-elect Obama and more than half the newly elected members of Congress to sign our principles. Our goal is to build this movement for the set of principles that are achievable and that the President-elect got a mandate for, and to see that in law in 2009. ■

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BY DAVID BARSAMIAN

## The Radical Conservative

At least at first glance, Andrew Bacevich might seem an unlikely candidate to have become one of the Iraq War's fiercest critics. A graduate of West Point and a Vietnam War veteran, Bacevich spent 23 years in the military before retiring as a colonel. In the late 1990s and early 2000s,

he contributed to the conservative *Weekly Standard* and *National Review*. These days, however, his writing is much more likely to appear in *The Nation*.

But it's difficult to say whether this marks a change in Bacevich's principles or those of the American conservative movement. As he wrote in his 2005 book, *The New American Militarism*, "My disenchantment with what passes for mainstream conservatism, embodied in the present Bush administration and its groupies, is just about absolute. ... [M]y views have come to coincide with the critique long offered by the radical left: It is the mainstream itself, the professional liberals as well as professional conservative who *define* the problem."

A professor of history and international relations at Boston University, Bacevich's latest book is *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism*, which draws on the philosopher Reinhold Niebuhr's warnings against "our dreams of managing history."

He recently spoke with *In These Times* about conservatives' response to his book, Iraq and why we shouldn't expect too much change from an Obama administration.

**In *The Limits Of Power*, you look at the consumption patterns of the average American citizen today. Given the urgency of a wartime situation, you're very critical.**

It's not simply that I'm troubled by con-

sumption in the context of a global war. I'm troubled by the patterns of consumption even apart from the war—in that we have come to expect that it is our due to live beyond our means, both as individuals and as a nation.

I'm not some kind of ascetic monk. I don't live in a cave. I probably enjoy a pretty good standard of living relative to many other people. Nonetheless, one senses a kind of a compulsion to acquire in our society. There is a mindlessness about it that I find troubling. Maybe that's just me admitting that I'm kind of an old-fashioned cultural conservative, but it's a concern especially because we can't pay for all the stuff that we're buying.

Add the war on top of that, and it does become more troubling. On the one hand, we have leaders like President Bush, proclaiming that this is a struggle that we should see as the equivalent of World War II, that the evil that we face is the equivalent of Nazi Germany or of Soviet totalitarianism. And yet, in an odd sense the country sort of says, "Yes, I got it, thank you very much," and then we just go back to doing what we were doing as if there were no war.

One consequence of that, of course, is that the burden of the war falls on our military. I think that the military has been abused over the last seven years. It's tremendously admirable that the Army and the Marine Corps, in particu-

lar, have hung together the way they've hung together. But that doesn't make it right, doesn't make it fair, and it certainly doesn't make it indefinitely sustainable.

**What's been the conservative response to your book?**

The conservatives have really been split by the war. I dare say, the majority of conservatives are loyal to the Republican Party, loyal to President Bush, support the war in general terms, may acknowledge that it was badly handled but would still argue that it was an appropriate enterprise.

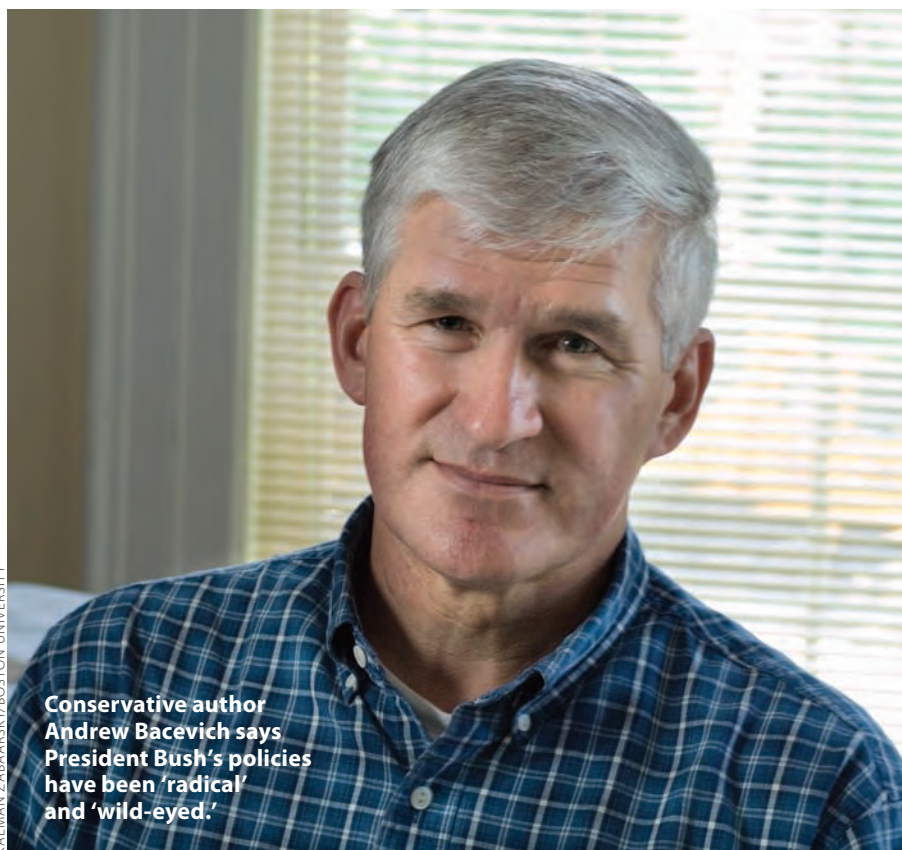
There is a minority of conservatives—I'm in that minority—that sees the policies of President Bush as anything but conservative, really seeing them as radical, as wild-eyed. The people who are in my camp—again, I emphasize, it's the minority—would argue that a principled conservative foreign policy needs to be a realistic foreign policy.

It's not a world in which good is pitted against evil. It's really a world in which gray is pitted against gray.

Even though we are a powerful nation, there are very real limits to our power, very real limits to our capacity to anticipate the consequences of our actions, and therefore we really ought to be a lot more modest in the way we approach the world.

**What are your views on Iraq?**

There is no question that security conditions have improved significantly over the past year and a half. Regardless of whether you think the war is a good idea or a bad idea, it's a good thing that the security conditions have improved. Those who have claimed that this is the result of a genius strategy called "the surge" probably are oversimplifying. The explanation for why security conditions have improved is complex, and it reflects as much internal decisions made—inter-



**Conservative author Andrew Bacevich says President Bush's policies have been 'radical' and 'wild-eyed.'**

nal to Iraq—as much as it does anything that we've done.

Does that mean that victory is at hand? I don't think so. Iraq still is in many respects a dependency, can't manage its own affairs. So we are stuck there, absent a sort of a decision by President-elect Obama to just draw a line and say, "This was a mistake and we're getting out."

It's important to ask, "What does it mean, what have we gained?" Among the numerous justifications for the war, one very important one was weapons of mass destruction. There were none. One was that somehow Saddam Hussein was in cahoots with al Qaeda. He was not.

The real justification, the real strategic plan, the real reason that the Bush administration went in is that they thought that by toppling Saddam, we could bring about rapid and efficient transformation of Iraqi society and make it into a somewhat liberal, modern, cohesive, functioning nation state, and that somehow that success in Iraq would be a precedent for achieving a similar transformation in other Muslim societies.

#### **Does that strike you as chutzpah?**

It strikes me as bizarre.

Even if tomorrow we declared victory in Iraq, the war has not provided a template for the, quote, unquote, transformation of the rest of the Middle East. Even if it ended tomorrow, we would have expended—what, \$800 billion or \$1 trillion?—and lost well more than 4,000 American lives.

Does anybody think we're going to similarly transform Iran or Syria or, God forbid, Pakistan? As a step in a longer-term strategic process, the Iraq War has failed.

**You're a professor. Across the board Americans are not very well versed in history, their own history or the history of other countries.**

When you're flying along at 35,000 feet and you're looking down, you say, "My God, this is a big country." We live in our own world—we *are* our own world. There are vast, wide-open spaces. There is something about the environment in which we Americans live that encourages a certain provincialism.

The notion that we've ever pursued an isolationist foreign policy is totally wrong

and unsustainable by our history. It's one of the great enduring myths. But the notion that we are an inward-looking people is not mythic. There is that inclination to look within and to not be especially interested in what is going on out there.

I myself am guilty. To the extent that I was interested in the world, say, 25 or 30 years ago, I was interested in the world that was defined by the Cold War. The world that mattered to me was the world of divided Germany and divided South Korea and the Soviet empire and places like that. I wasn't interested in Afghanistan or the history of Afghanistan. So, yes, I've discovered the history of Afghanistan, I've discovered something of the history of Iraq.

But we tend to be provincial, and that becomes a problem when we get up in the morning and decide we're going to go remake one of these distant places.

**In an op-ed in the *Los Angeles Times* in late August, you weren't very sanguine about real change coming to Washington on Jan. 20, 2009. You write, "The very structure of American politics imposes its own constraints." What are some of those constraints?**

I don't think presidents govern—administrations do. You have to look at the people they bring in. In many respects the people that I see surrounding Obama, at least with regard to foreign policy, aren't radically different from the people who surrounded McCain.

They're not identical, but it's not as if we've got a bunch of isolationists or peaceniks or whatever. You actually have a bunch of people around Obama who believe in the notion of American global leadership, believe that America should be the supreme military power, who, yes, believe that we screwed up Iraq. But Obama himself says quite frequently, I'm not going to hesitate to pull the trigger when I think I need to pull the trigger.

Also, we have to acknowledge the extent to which any administration is also hemmed in by interests. The president can get up in the morning and say, "I've got a great idea." But presidents operate within confines defined by sundry interests that don't want change to occur beyond certain limits. So the president is not going to save the day. ■





Assud the Bunny is the third character to appear on the children's show 'Tomorrow's Pioneers' on Hamas' al-Aqsa channel. His Mickey Mouse-esque predecessor 'Farfour' was shown being beaten to death by Israeli soldiers.

BY MICHELLE CHEN

## Live Chat—Resistance Now!

In October, a popular video-sharing website abruptly shut down. Notices circulated on the Web explained that the site's operators had been forced offline but were "making necessary arrangements" to relaunch. That was unwelcome news to

some of AqsaTube's most devoted followers, however.

Israel's Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center had been monitoring and reporting on AqsaTube, pressuring its Internet service provider at the time, the French company OVH, to cut off the site because of its alleged ties to terrorism.

AqsaTube's logo and modular design unabashedly ape its namesake, YouTube. But while the business model is unoriginal, this imitation's selling point is its unique theme: Palestinian resistance. The other half of AqsaTube's name evokes various emblems of the movement: the al-Aqsa mosque, Hamas' television network al-Aqsa TV, or the West Bank's al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade.

The site is mainly in Arabic with an occasional

smattering of English, such as a fuzzy subtitled video of a resistance fighter threatening retaliation against the Israeli city of Sderot—or a colorful flashing ad for "AqsaTube Live Chat—join with us now!"

The layout is studded with the visages of late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and other heroes of the struggle. Categories include "Palestinian heritage," "Quds brigades" and Hamas-produced children's shows.

Although OVH squelched the AqsaTube site following media inquiries, the site re-emerged days later, this time hosted by a Russian firm and displaying fresh videos, according to Israel's Information Center report.

In the Israeli-Palestinian saga, the AqsaTube controversy is a snapshot of a media landscape where nationalism and violence collide with popular culture.

Many Americans have little concept of political media in the Muslim world beyond news flashes of ominous al Qaeda videos. But mass communication has long been integral to more traditional resistance movements like Hamas and Hezbollah, which run extensive information networks on television and online.

In October, Hamas was reportedly featured at the National Exhibition and Festival of Digital Media in Iran, showcasing Internet communication as a vehicle to advance the Palestinian cause.

Eager to portray AqsaTube as a terrorist threat, Israeli watchdogs point to user-uploaded videos that glorify armed revolt, including menacing montages of masked soldiers and low-budget military training footage. Yet many AqsaTube videos defy the caricature of “jihadism” that corporate media have seared into the Western public’s imagination. Thumbnail menus percolate with pop videos, cartoons, cultural programs, even soccer match highlights. The open, crowd-sourced pastiche reveals more about the globalization of media culture than about users’ political agendas. That might explain why clips of the Arabic soap opera “Bab al-Hara” have drawn more traffic than martyr videos have.

Faisal Devji, a humanities professor at the New School specializing in modern Islamic thought, says Hamas has been spun into a powerful brand and is now “franchised and dispersed, rather than being directed by central command.”

AqsaTube’s content is user-driven, but its structure and background remain elusive. There appears to be no direct link to Hamas’ official media apparatus. According to an October BBC report, al-Aqsa TV denies affiliation with the site, and AqsaTube’s registration information was tied to an apparently falsified contact in Dubai.

At the same time, AqsaTube’s reach spans far beyond Hamas’ political locus in Gaza.

The largest share of the site’s traffic, about 30 percent, comes from Saudi Arabia, and more visits are drawn from Kazakhstan, Syria and the United States than from the Palestinian territories, according to the Web analysis service Alexa.

Gad Barzilai, a professor of internation-

al studies, law and political science at the University of Washington who focuses on Israeli-Palestinian issues, says Hamas and Hezbollah use the Web strategically to engage communities across the Arab diaspora, “because then we’re talking about political support, we’re talking about media

But he adds that media posturing may have little to do with ideology. Even if Hamas’ mission still centers on resisting Israeli occupation, supporters are nonetheless “pushed or pulled more and more into a more global way of seeing their own national struggle.”

## **As a product of pro-Palestinian activism, AqsaTube projects more hype than substance. But it’s a sign that a volatile conflict zone is being occupied by a new kind of political community.**

support. It’s mainly for political leverage within the Arab-Muslim region.”

Gary Bunt, an Islamic Studies professor at the University of Wales, Lampeter, who tracks new media in the Muslim world on VirtuallyIslamic.com, sees AqsaTube as a marketing tool for divergent political factions. By enabling users to reach a global audience with both “official and unofficial” viewpoints on Arab struggles, he says, “There appears to be a greater awareness of the implications and effects of placing content online and the most effective ways of generating an impact among diverse site visitors.”

AqsaTube’s Web presence embodies Hamas’ strengths as well as its weaknesses. Despite flaring violence in Gaza, Devji believes the group’s recent rise as a political institution—through the electoral process and its social service network—has brought legitimacy but perhaps dulled its rebel clout.

“They realize suddenly that they’re no longer at the forefront or the cutting edge of Islamic politics,” he says, and as extremists touting global jihad attract notoriety and media fascination, Hamas is “starting to look conservative.”

Could the militant viral videos on AqsaTube stem from a more radical vector within the movement? In waging their media war, Devji says, some Hamas instigators could be stealing from the playbook of groups like al Qaeda—whose spectacular jihadist theatrics have catapulted them to global fame.

Though devoted to a single cause, AqsaTube represents a complex form of digital democracy. On the Web frontier, cross-cultural exchange and agile technology are changing the way popular movements in Muslim and Arab societies define themselves.

“One of the myths is that these people in Hamas are rigid and tied to an ideological agenda, and don’t deviate from that,” says Ali Abunimah, co-founder of Electronic Intifada, a U.S.-based independent news site covering Israeli-Palestinian issues. “The reality is, they operate just like any other political and social movement. They’re very, very sensitive to public opinion. They’re very sensitive to international opinion.”

Electronic Intifada speaks to a broader media surge of independent Muslim and Arab voices, propelled not only by ideology-driven sites, but also alternative news outlets, activist social-networking platforms and dissident Egyptian bloggers.

As a product of pro-Palestinian activism, AqsaTube projects more hype than substance. But it’s a sign that a volatile conflict zone is being occupied by a new kind of political community.

“AqsaTube can be seen as an attempt at carving a space for Hamas and its affiliates in the multimedia environment of the 21st century,” says Lina Khatib, a lecturer on Middle East media and politics at the University of London. “This environment is a transnational and multiplatform one. The line between local politics and global politics is blurred.” ■

# FILM

## See Dick Squirm

By Kevin Canfield

**I**N 1977, BRITISH journalist David Frost sat down with former President Richard Nixon to conduct a series of television interviews. Over the course of 28 hours spread across several days, Frost elicited from Nixon one of the nation's most historic presidential apologies: "I let down my friends, I let down the country, I let down our system of government [and the] dreams of all those young people that ought to get into government but who think it's all too corrupt."

But the apology did not come before Nixon also reminded the TV audience that he was a master of obfuscation. He complained, for example, that the man interviewing him had an advantage because he had done more homework than the ex-president, and he referred to *Washington Post* journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's reporting on the Watergate scandal as a "famous series by some unnamed correspondents."

Frost and Nixon delved into other issues, as well, such as China, the Vietnam War and domestic concerns. But what made the interviews memorable was Nixon's cagey willingness to talk at length about Watergate for the first time since his 1974 resignation. Forty million people watched Frost grill Nixon—the biggest viewer total for any program of its kind up to that point.

Now two new movies document those legendary 1977 interviews: Director Ron Howard recreates them in his film, *Frost/Nixon*, released nationwide on Dec. 25.

But much less hyped—yet mandatory viewing for political junkies—is the documentary *Frost/Nixon: The Original Watergate Interviews*, released on DVD on Dec. 2. (The 80-plus minute documentary didn't appear in theaters before its DVD release. A second DVD of interviews is scheduled for release sometime in 2009.)

In press materials, Sig Sigworth, head of Liberation Entertainment, which distributed the film, noted that the "current political climate in America" made the Frost/Nixon interviews topical. One would hope that

President Bush—like Nixon—will eventually have to answer for his administration's actions: from two protracted wars (one launched on discredited evidence) to torture and abuse in violation of the Geneva Conventions to internal scandals involving lobbyists and top administration officials, the list of egregious errors goes on and on.

During Frost's November appearance on "The Daily Show," host Jon Stewart suggested that Frost should try to pry some answers out of Bush. (If Nixon took almost 30 hours to talk about a mishandled break-in, imagine the time Frost might need to talk about Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantánamo, wire-tapping, and other Bush legacies.)

With Nixon, Frost was able to get far more out of the ex-president than any of the investigators, elected officials and scoop-hungry reporters who had dogged him until the end of his abbreviated second term. (Nixon was paid \$1 million for the interviews—a substantial incentive for the former president to talk.)

In his Aug. 8, 1974, resignation speech, the closest Nixon came to an apology was when he said, "I would say only that if some of my judgments were wrong, and some were wrong, they were made in what I believed at the time to be the best interest of the nation."

But by the end of his interviews with Frost, Nixon admits, "I let the American people down. And I have to carry that burden with me for the rest of my life. My political life is over."

Moments like these remind us why

Nixon was so famously uncomfortable in front of TV cameras, and Frost's production crew didn't try to make him more telegenic. As the dashing Frost was filmed from a distance that framed his casual body language and stylish black suit, Nixon was often captured up-close, his fleshy face and silver hair filling the screen in a way that was at once dour and comical.

In an interview shot for the DVD's extra footage, Frost says Nixon seemed to have had second thoughts about giving so much of himself.

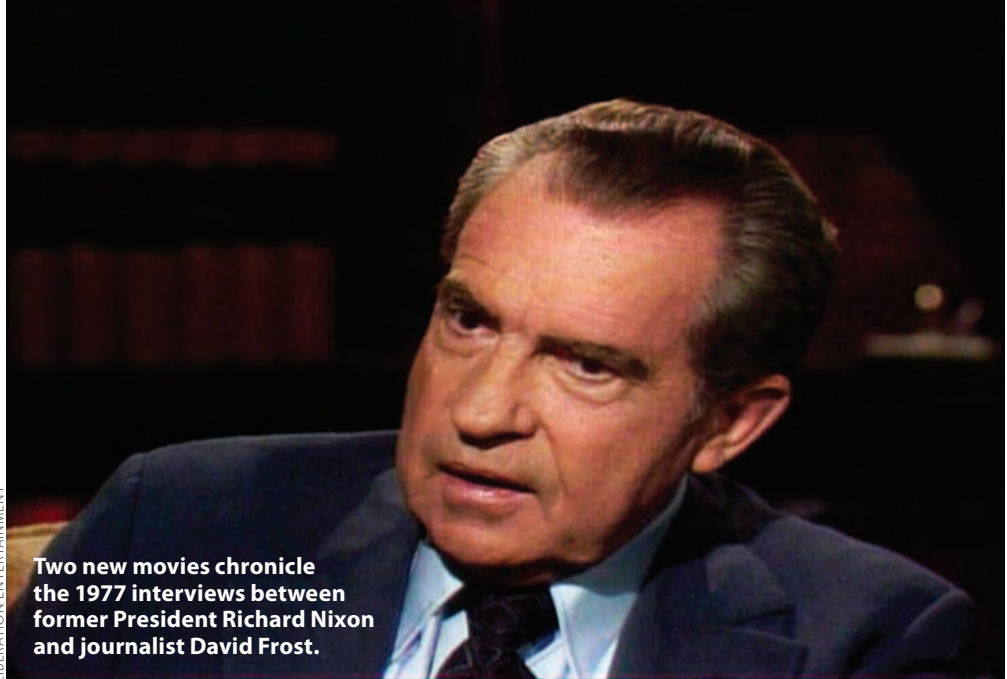
"Soon afterward, I think he probably did regret having done the interviews, because he had admitted—[he had] gone much further in his mea culpa than he expected to do, or anybody had expected him to do," Frost says. Moments later, he adds, "But then, later on, he probably realized that he could never have done that, he could have never re-emerged in polite society ... without having confronted these issues in a forum which was not biased in his favor."

By Frost's telling, he helped Nixon reclaim his humanity. The journalist, meanwhile, walked away with the acclaim of his audience and his peers—and with at least one great, off-camera story. As Frost recalls in the extras, the always awkward Nixon, attempting "to be one of the boys," turned to the journalist and asked, "Did you do any fornicating this weekend?"

Frost could barely think of a reply to such an oddly phrased question. And for a moment, Nixon was no longer the one on the defensive. ■

LIBERATION ENTERTAINMENT

**Two new movies chronicle the 1977 interviews between former President Richard Nixon and journalist David Frost.**





## BOOKS

# It's Not Easy Becoming Green

By David Roberts

ONE EARLY JULY morning in Austin, Texas, I sat slumped in a cavernous, featureless conference hall on the last day of Netroots Nation, the annual gathering of progressive bloggers. Half the attendees had already split town. Two days of events and two nights of vigorous celebration had left those who remained bleary-eyed, weakly nursing their bad coffee and stale muffins.

The morning's only featured speaker was African-American activist Van Jones, co-founder of the national advocacy group Green for All, who had come straight off a plane from the North Pole. (Really.) Given his exhaustion—and ours—Jones could have been forgiven

for phoning it in.

Instead, he began joking, cajoling and provoking, weaving an urgent narrative out of class, race, activism and the existential threat of global climate change. Sleepy bloggers sat up a little straighter and closed their laptops. They began nodding, then cheering, then rising to their feet, stomping and shouting. After a half hour, the previously somnolent room hummed with energy.

It's not just bloggers and activists—Jones has also gotten rapturous reception from business executives, politicians and community groups.

In fact, it's difficult to think of another progressive activist who has created as much national buzz as quickly. His self-effacing humor, sharp intellect and unapologetic idealism call to mind another black orator who recently found success.

It is not lost on Jones—who, as co-founder of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, spent much of the '90s

organizing around criminal justice and urban issues—that he received exponentially more attention after he started talking green, or that affluent white environmentalists take a certain unearned satisfaction from having him at their meetings and among their ranks. But he has used the spotlight to drive home a message that he has now put to paper in *The Green Collar Economy: How One Solution Can Fix Our Two Biggest Problems* (HarperOne, October).

The message is fairly simple: Meeting the challenge of global climate change will involve an enormous amount of work—solarizing and retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency, manufacturing electric cars and parts for wind turbines, building public transit systems and smarter electrical grids, and much more.

The next few decades will see the creation of millions of blue-collar jobs that serve to meliorate social and environmental ills—known as “green-collar” jobs.

## [ art space ]



### THE LOOK OF SOUND

How does sound look? In “St. Cecilia,” Chicago-based artist Joseph Grigely, 52, deaf since age 10, examines the nuances of seeing and hearing. He does this through video, sculpture, sound and works on paper.

The exhibit uses video projections of the Baltimore Choral Arts Society singing three traditional Christmas carols with new lyrics written by Grigely. The carols demonstrate “lip misreading”—identical lip formations that produce dissimilar sounds. “We’re Bantering Drunkening About What’s Important In Life,” shown at left, displays notes taken from Grigely’s conversations since the 1970s.

“St. Cecilia,” named for the patron saint of music, runs through Feb. 22, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago ([www.mcachicago.org](http://www.mcachicago.org)).

—Alison Hamm

Jones argues that these jobs should be directed to those who have been most harmed by the “pollution-based economy”—such as ex-felons, recovering addicts, at-risk youth, the working poor, those who have seen their jobs outsourced, and people of color (who have disproportionately suffered from high rates of asthma, cancer and other ailments tied to environmental toxins).

Further, government and the private sector should work together to ensure that they are *good* jobs, with living wages, decent benefits and clear career paths.

It’s not just a matter of justice, says Jones, but of simple necessity. There will never be sufficient political action on climate change if the only group pushing it is the “eco-elite.” To realize the scale of changes needed—and at the speed needed—will require the broadest possible coalition, big enough to take on the “military-petroleum complex,” as Jones calls it.

That means bringing in the working class and many people of color by focusing on kitchen table issues—jobs, economic security and health. It means toning down the polar bears and Priuses and bringing out the hard hats and caulk guns.

Everyone who isn’t mobilized into the “green growth coalition” will be mobilized against it, warns Jones, just as poor people of color turned out against California’s Proposition 87 in 2006. In that referendum, oil companies spent millions convincing people that the measure, which would have taxed oil companies to pay for clean energy, would increase the price of fuel and food.

The call for green jobs that Jones (among others) helped launch has been taken up by President-elect Barack Obama, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Senate Speaker Harry Reid (D-Nev.), several dozen governors, and—via the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement—more than 900 U.S. mayors.

Just as the green growth narrative gained strength, the country was hit by a devastating economic crisis. Broad consensus has coalesced around the need for large-scale public stimulus spending,

just as broad consensus has coalesced around the need for green infrastructure, clean energy, energy efficiency and green-job training.

Van Jones, it would appear, is riding the zeitgeist.

It’s a shame, then, that his book captures so little of his personal magnetism and energy. As a sketch of the green growth movement’s rationale and agenda, *The Green Collar Economy* is competent—but merely competent. The book often reads like a book report or a lawyer’s brief.

Those who have heard Jones speak will have difficulty hearing his voice behind the earnest, flat-footed prose. Certainly, some of his humor would have served to leaven the heavy proceedings.

At the literary level, Jones has a difficulty that is common with first-time nonfiction writers—how to mix abstraction and anecdote, telling and showing.

Large swaths of high-toned rhetoric are interspersed here and there with awkward lists of examples. Many individual passages shine, but it will take another book or two before Jones masters the art of letting his stories make his points for him.

The author’s natural voice can be most clearly heard where he describes the challenges of building a “hybrid movement”—a “movement at the inter-

section of the social justice and ecology movements, of entrepreneurship and activism, of inner change and social change.”

Few have better insight into both sides of those divides than Jones, who has spent a career shuttling from Oakland to Marin County, from poverty to affluence, and from concern over the next paycheck to concern over Arctic ice shelves. He has lobbied legislators. He has pitched to idealistic college activists and to weary single moms.

In the process, he has cultivated a kind of deliberate, pragmatic empathy. And the lessons he draws from that—about how liberals can develop a more confident and inclusive approach to power, reclaim a convincing populism and begin working across conventional barriers—are worth the price of the book.

The scientific and economic arguments for urgent action on climate change are impeccable.

The politics are ripe.

The policy proposals—which Jones lays out in great detail over two chapters—are credible.

But the notion that the fractured, isolated camps of the progressive coalition can overcome their hang-ups and unite to shape a just and sustainable future ... let’s just say that requires large measures of hope.

Then again, there’s a lot of that going around these days. ■

VINCE BUCCI/GETTY IMAGES

**Eco-activist Van Jones accepts an award at Global Green USA’s 12th annual Green Cross Millennium Awards on June 14, in Santa Monica, Calif.**





## BOOKS

# Jim Crow in the North

By Lewis M. Steel

FOR GENERATIONS, THE North has given itself credit for being less racially biased than the South, and for being the better place for African Americans to live.

The logic was straightforward—at least to Northerners. After Reconstruction ended in 1876, the South imposed Jim Crow, which it enforced with lynchings and state-sanctioned brutality. As a result, millions of blacks fled to the North.

After World War II, northern states began passing civil rights laws that prohibited discrimination—in theory, at least—and protected voting rights, long before Congress passed similar laws in the 1960s.

Northerners have forgotten, however, how hard it was for blacks living above the Mason-Dixon Line to struggle to achieve rudimentary freedoms.

While the North has had no Selma march, no Birmingham church bombing, and no George Wallace pronouncement of “segregation now, segregation tomorrow and segregation forever,” virtually every northern city had its share of racial killings, cross burnings and white riots.

In *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (Random House, November), Thomas J. Sugrue, a professor of history and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, lays bare the difficulty blacks have had in the North from before the first black Great Migration in the '20s to the present.

This 80-year chronicle of recent history is, at best, a glass-half-empty tale.

The '20s, as Sugrue tells it, was an era of growing hostility, as blacks moved north. Restrictive covenants blocked black entry into many neighborhoods. Schools were openly segregated. Shopkeepers and theaters displayed “whites only” signs. Sugrue writes, “Even celebrities such as Josephine Baker, Paul

Robeson, Dorothy Dandridge and Marian Anderson had a hard time finding rooms and faced Jim Crow in restaurants when they toured the North.”

In the '30s, blacks gained some voice in the Roosevelt administration, and some New Deal programs provided them relief from the Great Depression. But racism prevailed in many government programs. Federal housing agencies deemed black neighborhoods unworthy of credit, and federal officials segregated public housing. The '30s and '40s also saw white riots—in cities such as Chicago, Detroit and Los Angeles—aimed at restricting blacks to neighborhoods they already occupied.

However, the war mobilization in the late '30s and early '40s, and threats of massive black demonstrations, did force the federal government to open up defense-related job opportunities.

Sugrue writes about A. Philip Randolph's threatened 1941 march on Washington, which led to President Roosevelt's executive order forbidding defense contractors from discriminating based

on race. After further pressure, black employment in the aircraft industry increased, and auto industry employment jumped from 3 percent in the early part of the decade to 15 percent by 1945.

After World War II, northern cities became even more segregated as blacks moved into urban areas and whites migrated to the suburbs. Large-scale developments—such as the Levittowns in Long Island, N.Y., and Bucks County, Pa.—restricted occupancy for whites only.

*Sweet Land of Liberty* also takes an incomplete look at the northern courtroom struggles to attack discrimination during the '60s and '70s.

Robert L. Carter, the general counsel of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)—for whom I worked in the '60s—believed that the U.S. Supreme Court had to apply in the North the same equal educational opportunities doctrine central to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

The nation's most distinguished social scientists and educators testified

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



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## excerpt

in northern federal courts about segregation's harmful effects irrespective of intent, but every appeals court that considered the issue rejected the NAACP's position, and the Supreme Court refused to review these decisions.

Perhaps white flight would have yielded segregated schools in some locations no matter how the courts had ruled—as happened in Boston, Sugrue writes—but integration could have at least come to small-sized and medium-sized school districts, and a high court ruling would have given the movement its moral and legal authority.

Carter also advocated broad legal solutions to employment discrimination. In 1964, he tried to open public construction sites to black workers by suing New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller and New York City Mayor Robert Wagner, charging they were turning an unconstitutional blind eye on craft union discrimination. New York's highest court, however, was unimpressed, ruling 7-0. But three years later, our office won a similar case in a federal trial court against Ohio's Gov. James Rhodes.

Sugrue does not discuss these efforts, however, or what kind of effect Carter's 1968 resignation—along with his staff's (over a freedom of speech issue)—had on the NAACP's legal program.

*Sweet Land of Liberty* argues that the North's efforts to achieve racial equality stagnated in the '70s and '80s and never recovered. Sugrue blames this on "the mismatch between social movements and the huge social problems they faced"—problems caused by "hypermobility of capital," "the growing gap between rich and poor" and "the triumph of the market."

He also argues that the old national civil rights organizations—such as the NAACP—were in decline, replaced by community-oriented grassroots movements that revolved around War on Poverty programs. However, community-based activism was unable to counter structural changes, such as the loss of well-paid industrial jobs, tax policies favoring the rich and an anti-government ideology.

Sugrue discusses the black power

### THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

*The following is excerpted from A.S. Hamrah's "Jessica Biel's Hand: The Cinematic Quagmire" (from the periodical n+1, No. 7), in which Hamrah reviews some three dozen films dealing with Iraq or the war on terror:*

These are the tropes of the war-on-terror movies: fake Middle Eastern music, constant TV news and radio commentary, scenes of combat shot in Morocco instead of Iraq, actors we don't recognize speaking Arabic with subtitles, videos of men in ski masks proclaiming in Arabic while holding a Westerner hostage, American soldiers accidentally killing an Iraqi woman or child, vets losing their shit in their hometowns, a constant resort to cell phones, a scorpion fight, titles identifying every location change, a cut to black to avoid showing something horrible, a pre-credits wrap-up crawl that tells us what happened later, blonde wives back home. It's amazing how everyone has a blonde wife back home. You'd think al Qaeda made these movies. ...

Dick Cheney has told us this war will not end in our lifetime. An era of endless war chokes off the kind of evaluation that in the past has produced the best war movies. If the war on terror never ends, those films cannot be made. Evaluation will be left to films like *The Dark Knight*, which indulge our longing for relief from war at the same time as they replicate its stasis and reconfigure its atrocities as blockbuster entertainment.

You always hear conservatives say Hollywood hates America. To me, what proves Hollywood hates America is the way they keep making Batman movies. Meanwhile, no Hollywood filmmakers have gone to Iraq. All the

1990s World War II films Hollywood made, the *Saving Private Ryan*s, with their Pentagon advisers and Department of Defense equipment they got at the cost of script approval, were made by people pretending they wanted to go to war. *If only we had a war*, they seemed to moan. *Ach, we were born too late!*

Here was your chance, Hollywood, to emulate the Greatest Generation filmmakers you professed to admire so much. What you made instead were things like *War of the Worlds*, a film that reveled in the destruction of New York, then hightailed it through the woods to grandmother's house. Sleep tight.



movement, but he has little positive to say about it. He instead sees electoral politics becoming the focus of community leaders, resulting in many blacks being elected to local and state offices. Yet many black officials—hobbled by budgetary constraints and aware of their white constituents' concerns—could do little more than preserve the status quo.

In his epilogue, Sugrue writes that civil rights gains have been rolled back, activists have been forced on the defen-

sive, affirmative action has died, and racial disparities in wealth, housing, education and healthcare have widened.

As to Sugrue's contention that electoral politics have become the new civil rights arena, President-elect Barack Obama's election certainly makes his point. The question remains, however, as to whether Obama, by focusing on poverty issues rather than race in these times of severe economic decline, can advance the civil rights struggle in the North, as well as the South. ■

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

# Cancer: Cause and Defects



**W**HEN SARAH PALIN says stupid things, they have the virtue of sounding really dumb. Appropriate derision greeted her insistence that what caused global warming “kind of

doesn’t matter at this point ... we need to do something about it.”

But when the cancer research establishment pours billions into treatment while ignoring causes, it cuts off hope of preventing an affliction that will visit half of U.S. men and more than a third of women.

Hope for current and future victims centers around a new wave of genetics-based research. For cancer, it turns out, location is not everything. New DNA studies are showing that a particular breast cancer may have more in common with, say, a kidney cancer than with other breast cancers.

“Once you throw away the notion of cancer as an anatomically defined disease and focus on these molecular abnormalities, treatment becomes a different ball game,” wrote Linda Geddes in the Oct. 22 issue of *New Scientist*.

New treatments using individualized vaccines created from a patient’s own tumor, and custom designed chemo and radiation therapies based on genetic markers, will turn some cancers from lethal to chronic diseases—at least when people have access to expensive treatments.

Last year, when for the first time researchers decoded all the genes of a cancer patient, they found mutations that are likely linked to the disease. But what they did not look for is what caused the mutations in the first place.

Heredity is thought to be responsible for 5 percent to 10 percent of cancers. Dr. Timothy Ley, director of the study that decoded the first cancer genes, told the *New York Times* that, in effect, the remaining 90 to 95 percent of cancers are due to chance: “Most of the [the mutations that spark cancer] are just these random events in the universe that add up to something horrible.”

But while the synergy that ends in cancer is complex, it is not random.

“People are getting more cancer because they’re exposed to more cancer-causing agents,” concludes a 2005 study by scientists at Boston University School of Public Health and University of Massachusetts, Lowell. They linked the post-World War II proliferation of environmental toxins to an increase in cancer, which the World Health Organization predicts will kill 45 percent more people from 2007 to 2030.

The list of proven carcinogens we encounter each day is as long. Most of them—unlike tobacco and excess sun—are hard to avoid. In 2002, some 24,379 U.S. facilities “reported disposing of or otherwise releasing 4.79 billion pounds of over 650 different chemicals.” That figure does not include vehicle emissions, most pesticides, volatile organic compounds and fertilizers.

In 1991, the National Research Council estimated that one in every six Americans lived within four miles of a Superfund site—the nation’s worst toxic waste sites.

So, since science has established a causal link between exposure to certain chemicals and certain cancers, between radiation and potentially dangerous gene mutations, between particular job exposures and particular cancers, why do we persist, Palin-like, in denying cause and concentrating on treatment?

Enter a chronic and potentially fatal disease: unchecked profit motive.

“The struggle [between treatment and prevention] occurs across a fault line defined by money,” writes Peter Montague in *Rachel’s Democracy & Health News*. “[T]here’s no money in prevention, and once you’ve got cancer you’ll pay anything to try to stay alive. Cancer treatment is therefore a booming business, and cancer prevention is nowhere.”

Humanitarians and scoundrels alike at hospitals, pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies, university and private research programs, and government bureaucracies have stakes in the treatment industry. Not only is prevention less lucrative, but it is also likely to cost industries vast profits if they stop using, discharging or cleaning up known carcinogens—or compensating those who fall ill.

So, back to the global warming parallel. For decades, deniers—often compensated by the very corporations that profited from ignoring climate change—argued, while Earth burned, that they lacked evidence of causality. So, too, the cancer-complicit industries push for lower safety standards and ludicrously claim that the link is weak between cancer and exposure to carcinogens.

Developing new cancer treatments and cures is crucial, especially for those facing slash-and burn-treatments—even when refined by genetic advances.

But treatment should not eclipse preventing environmentally triggered cancer in the billions who fall victim, not only to cancer, but also to Palin-like ignorance of the relation between cause and effect. ■

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# Truth Machine

Continued from back page

human being wired with electrodes into a tube that is essentially a large magnet. Measure blood flow in the brain and produce an image that is filled with bright and dark spots. The fMRI reads your brain in real time by measuring the flow and use of oxygen.

The theory behind the fMRI's ability to detect a lie is based on human physiology. It takes more effort to tell a lie than to tell the truth, so, if you are lying, your brain works harder and more oxygen is used. Put the person in an fMRI machine, ask questions and interpret the relatively bright and dark spots.

Throughout the United States, fMRIs are used in labs and hospitals to study brain injuries, states of meditation, physical centers of mental disorders, happiness, lust, emotional states and a plethora of other states of mind. But the attacks of 9/11 gave a whole new urgency to the idea.

Jonathan Moreno, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress and author of *Mind Wars: Brain Research and National Defense*, estimates that at least 50 U.S. labs began studying the use of neuroscience and lie detection after 9/11, many of them funded by the Department of Defense.

"There's enormous pressure coming from the government for this," says Paul Root Wolpe, a bioethicist at the University of Pennsylvania. "There is reason to believe a lot of money and effort is going into creating these technologies."

But as quickly as the interest has grown, so, too, have concerns over its implications.

Henry T. Greely, a Stanford University law professor and a leading critic of using fMRI for lie detection, argues that there are three fundamental problems. First, there is no evidence that the technology works. Second, there's no evidence that lies can be detected. And third, there's no regulation of the field. In effect, Greely says, "Anyone can promise anything."

He rejects the claim of high lie-detecting accuracy, largely because the experiments are conducted in controlled settings. Cephus and No Lie base their results on

studies with students being dishonest and honest in artificial situations. Greely says such studies tell us nothing about real life.

Ethicists, too, are alarmed. Although the emphasis these days is on the accused proving their innocence, giving credence to the technology could invite misuse or abuse.

The MacArthur Foundation's Law and

a technological obsession can go wrong is rife with examples of what Gazzaniga worries about.

Despite the Supreme Court's 1998 rejection of lie detector technology on the grounds that it was not reliable, lie detectors are still used in job interviews, security clearances and interrogations.

In April 2008, the Pentagon started

## What does the classic lie detector actually measure? Is a change in pulse and blood pressure evidence of a lie or simply evidence of nervousness?

Neuroscience Project is one of a series of initiatives across the United States trying to make sense of the burgeoning use of neuroscience in legal matters.

According to Michael S. Gazzaniga, the project's director, "The risk that science rejected for use in courts—due to the stringent requirements for accuracy—may still be used widely in society for other purposes is always present."

The traditional lie detector device—which requires hooking the subject up to wires to record pulse, blood pressure and breathing—burst into the world in the 1920s when medical student John Larson and police officer Leonarde Keeler announced they had created a truth machine.

The lie detector test has had a troubled history ever since. Ken Alder, a historian at Northwestern University and author of *The Lie Detectors: The History of An American Obsession*, describes the concept of using technology to sort out truth and lies as "uniquely American."

Greely, Wolpe and others detect two major conceptual mistakes in the whole idea of lie detection. First, measuring the actions of the brain does not tell you anything about what the brain is actually thinking. Second, lying should be judged not by machines but by people.

It's similar to a fundamental dilemma. What does the classic lie detector actually measure? Is a change in pulse and blood pressure evidence of a lie or simply evidence of nervousness?

Alder's exhaustive exploration of how

issuing hand-held lie detectors to soldiers in Afghanistan. It argued that the device's inaccuracy didn't matter so long as it gave soldiers an edge in confronting possible terrorists. This "erring on the side of technology" over reality is what scares many observers with the growth of fMRI technology.

Jonathan Marks, a bioethicist at Penn State University who studies interrogation techniques in the war on terror, says the use of fMRIs could, in fact, increase the use of torture.

"[P]eople [could] begin to say, 'the fMRI picked him out as a terrorist so let us give him a going over in the interrogation room,'" says Marks. "Contrary to the view that fMRI will render torture obsolete, it might become a license for further abuse of detainees because its readings will convince people that they have a terrorist on their hands."

Nightmare scenarios, like the ones Marks suggests, have the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) concerned.

Barry Steinhardt, director of the ACLU's Technology and Liberty Project, says fMRIs need to be kept in check.

"There are certain things that have such powerful implications for our society—and for humanity at large—that we have a right to know how they are being used so that we can grapple with them as a democratic society," says Steinhardt. "These brain-scanning technologies are far from ready for forensic uses and, if deployed, will inevitably be misused and misunderstood." ■



# THE TRUTH MACHINE

## Detecting lies or setting the stage for abuse?

BY PETER KAVANAGH

**I**MAGINE: A CONVICTED DRUNK driver who needs to convince a judge he hasn't had a drink in years. A father in a custody battle who needs to prove he did not abuse his spouse. A suspected corporate thief who needs to prove his innocence.

These are just some of the people willing to pay \$5,000, or more, to expose their brains to scientists to show that their words match their truthfulness.

Knowing for certain when someone is lying is the stuff of dystopian science fiction—and the hope of cops and spies around the world.

And, if some aggressive technology entrepreneurs get their way, the technology will become a reality, coming soon to courts and interrogation rooms near you.

What makes this possible is functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which has already transformed the world of neuroscience.

Cephos Corporation and No Lie MRI are two American

companies at the forefront of using fMRI technology to verify truth in the corporate, government and legal realms.

Cephos, based in Massachusetts, argues that its techniques fit all the legal standards and tests to be admissible in court.

No Lie, based in California, has scores of clients interested in using its process as evidence of their truthfulness in court hearings.

Steven J. Laken, founder of Cephos—whose corporate motto is “Our Business Is the Truth,” and whose mission statement reads, “We believe Truth is among the most valuable of commodities”—claims a 93 percent success rate in determining truth-telling from lying. (Humans are typically able to tell the difference between truth and lies about 50 percent of the time, and traditional lie detector machines average around 85 percent.)

Both companies are confident that within months, judges will allow fMRI results to be admitted in trials. Despite the corporate confidence that Cephos and No Lie exude, legal scholars, neuroscientists and ethicists are much less optimistic.

The technology behind the fMRI is relatively simple. Slide a

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